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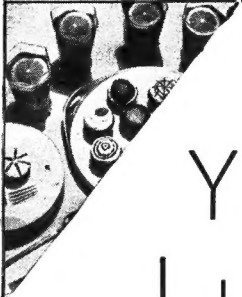
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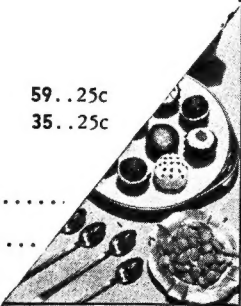
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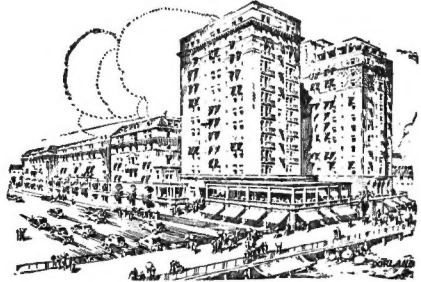
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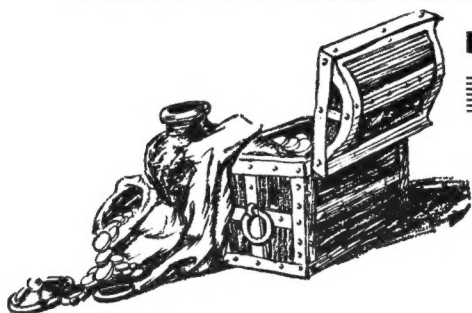


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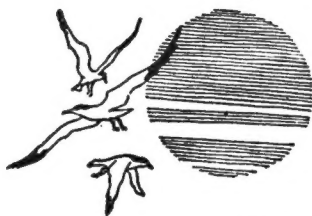
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The MAN on the MAT

By TALBOT MUNDY

EVERYBODY in India had seemed to know some one else, who knew a man, who knew a genuine *guru*. There had been credible tales, and incredible ones. There had also been false *gurus*—fairly easy to detect because, sooner or later, they either boasted or demanded money. Charlie Grover visited so many caves and temples that he could not remember the names or whereabouts of half of them, and he had almost given up the hunt when at last, as if by accident, he was sent for.

A Hindu about fifty years old came to Charlie as he sat on a rock, by a bridle path on a slope of Mt. Abu in Rajputana, considering the problem of a lamed horse. He spoke agreeably good English in a soft voice, and his manner was neither over-confident nor too respectful—in fact, a very gentlemanly manner, although half a dollar would have easily refinanced his wardrobe.

"He will see you, sahib."

"Who will?"

"He whom you seek, and whose *chela* I am."

Then Charlie remembered that *chelas* are seldom permitted to name their *gurus*, supposing even that they know their real names, the reason being that a *guru* does not advertise and does object to being mobbed and asked to show his familiarity with unknown forces. No genuine *guru* cares whether or not other people believe in his existence or his powers. So it looked like the possible end of the trail. However, men don't get Congressional medals of honor for being rotters. Charlie Grover happened to possess one, although he had never worn it since the day it was presented. He was the kind of man who at-

tends to his obligations before snatching something for himself.

"I have a lame horse."

"Then the three of us will walk as slowly as is necessary. He shall be attended to," the *chela* answered.

So they followed a track over a hillside where the rose-quartz sparkled through the spring grass, brown against an azure sky. And they came, amid blossomy trees, to a farmstead that looked orderly and prosperous for Rajputana. There was a thatched house, a thatched barn, three teams of oxen ploughing. Spring water splashed from a cleft in a rock, and birds sang blithely, which is rare in India.

"This is a good place," said Charlie. "Does the *guru* live here?"

"Sometimes he is here. If you will tie up your horse in that barn, some one shall care for him."

So Charlie unsaddled the horse and left him resting in the cool shade; then he washed himself at the spring and let the wind and sun serve for towel. After that he fastened and unfastened his tie two or three times and wished he had a hair brush.

"I am ready," he said, turning to the *chela*.

There was a man who might not be a Hindu, although he was dressed as one, who sat cross legged on a mat, at the foot of a tree on a slope that faced the farmhouse. He was whittling a big peg with a small knife, smiling to himself and humming as he shaped the peg to his satisfaction. It was he whom they approached, and Charlie wondered whether this might be another *chela*, it being his understanding that a *guru* has as many of them as he feels able to instruct. Or it might be the

A Mystic Tale of Rajputana



farmer himself, although he looked too clean for that, and not worried enough. As they drew near the man spoke to the *chela*.

"Take this peg and fit it to that bullock's yoke; the one they are using galls the poor beast. Then attend to this sahib's horse. It is only a little matter, but it is painful, so be gentle with him."

The *chela* turned away without a word and Charlie approached nearer to the man, surprised not only by his speaking

English but by the ease with which he used it and by the resonance of his bass voice. The man had a rather full beard, but no turban. He wore a white skullcap, and a coarse white cotton smock that revealed part of his chest. He had skin like satin. Charlie bowed to him.

"Excuse me, I am looking for a *guru*."

"You could have gone on looking until you were dead," the man answered, "if you had not passed a wayside test or two."

"Do you mean it was known I was looking?" Charlie asked him.

"How not? If a fish moves in the sea, the farthest stars must ultimately feel its movement. How should a *guru* not know when a pilgrim sets forth on the Middle Way? Is not a man more than a fish? And is a *guru* not nearer to him than the stars are? Many set forth. Few attain the object of their search, because few are fitted for it. Nevertheless, the search will do those failures no harm."

"I was told just now," said Charlie, "that the *guru* whom I seek will see me."

"He has seen you for a long time," said the other. "Perhaps now he will let you see him."

"Will you lead me to him?"

"That may not be necessary. He may wish to sit here; he enjoys this tree and often sits here teaching. I should offer you a seat on this mat, but I know your Western sinews yield uncomfortably to our Oriental way of sitting. Will you try that chair instead?"

Charlie had not noticed a chair until that moment; however, there was one, so he sat on it.



"WHAT do you want with the *guru*?" the man asked him. "If you care to tell me, I will listen."

"I would rather tell him," Charlie answered.

"Doubtless."

"Well," said Charlie, "to put it briefly, I need teaching and I wish to be a *chela*. I have heard—and I know there are *gurus* who understand life, although I have never met one."

"Why should this one teach you?"

"I can't think of any reason, except that I ask it. I have been told that really great *gurus* never turn down applicants whose character bears investigation. I am hoping mine will bear it. There is nothing else in the world that I want to do."

"Why not?"

"Since the war," said Charlie, "life, for me, has been a wilderness. I had a wife

and child and we were happy. When the war broke I was offered a commission. I went through the war unscathed—did well, in fact; I was promoted and received some decorations. But I found my wife and child dead and buried when I returned home. I believe I nearly lost my reason. I am sure I would have lost it but for the same half philosophy, half intuition that I think preserved me through the fighting in Belleau Wood and at Château Thierry."

"That must be a very positive philosophy, I should say."

"No, I believe it's negative," said Charlie. "It amounts to this: That all experience is hypnotic—an illusion. Even war is an illusion. I stuck to that thought day and night until the Armistice. Bullets—shellfire—bayonets—it was all mass hypnotism. And when I returned and found my young wife and our child dead and buried in one grave, I had nothing else than that half philosophy to preserve me from losing my mind. If that, too, was not an illusion I should have to kill myself; the grief and loneliness were too much."

"What reality did you put in place of the illusion?"

"Nothing. I could think of nothing to put in place of it. I was forced to concede my own existence, because otherwise what is it that has experience and suffers? But at that point I was baffled. That is why I am here."

"You propose," said the man on the mat, "to take advantage of a *guru's* wisdom without putting yourself to the necessity of working for it?"

"Not at all," Charlie answered. "I am willing to work. All I ask is instruction. I have attended lectures, read books and studied every scrap of philosophy that I could find in my own country. I have been like Jason hunting for the Golden Fleece. But I don't know what the Golden Fleece is, so how can I find it unless some one tells me?"

"And you think *he* will tell you? What if he should tell you wrong?"

"I don't fear that."

"Why?"

"Because I have learned how to detect illusion, which is the result of hypnotism. No one can be made to believe a lie without first being hypnotized in one way or another; and I know how to protect myself against that."

"Do you?"

"Yes," said Charlie.

"That is a lot to have learned in one lifetime," the man on the mat remarked. "Why should a *guru* give his time to you, when there are so many who need to learn what you say you already know? You yourself should take *chelas* and teach them."

"Don't you see that I am hungry to know something positive?" said Charlie. "I am willing to leave behind me all the past—everything that once seemed important. I am willing to submit to any test whatever, and to undergo any amount of humiliation if that is needed. I am in deadly earnest. Life is nothing to me if I can't find some one who will show me what it all means."

The man on the mat shook his head.

"What does it matter that you know or don't know? Will your ignorance or knowledge change life's meaning or its purpose?"

"Kindly introduce me to the *guru*," Charlie answered. "I will explain my need to him and he will understand."

But again the man on the mat shook his head. He picked up the knife and began whittling another yoke pin.

"If you are still anxious to meet the *guru*, then return in two years. Meanwhile, use what you already know."

"But I have told you. I only know how to protect myself from hypnotism."

"Use that knowledge."

"Then you won't introduce me?"

"Not for two years."

Charlie recognized finality and glanced at his watch from force of habit. It was exactly midday. Sadly, because his heart was set on spiritual information and he had thrown his whole integrity into the search for it, Charlie withdrew. He supposed this fellow was a sort of Cerberus

appointed to protect his *guru* from unnecessary interruption; possibly a near initiate—a *chela* far enough advanced to be entrusted with such duty of discrimination. But it hurt to be turned down. All the utter loneliness and misery of having lost his wife and child swept back, almost overwhelming him. He had not a friend in the world, since he could not endure to meet the old friends who had known his happiness, and to new ones he felt he had nothing to offer, nor they anything to offer him.

Life held nothing. How should he employ himself for two years? Should he stay near this place? He was sure he had come within reach of a *guru*, and at that a great one; only a great one could have known by intuition that a stranger sought him. And he was all the more sure when he saw his horse being led toward him, healed of the lameness. Charlie was philosopher enough to understand that any one who actually knows what life is should be able to heal dumb animals without much effort; it is not knowing what life is that makes us helpless. Two years? He would try to endure them. Self-examination and self-discipline might make him more acceptable.



BUT as he mounted the horse and rode away his courage almost failed. He felt as if his wife and child knew, and that they also valued fame and medals not at all, but grieved that he was not worthy to be a wise one's *chela*. The old impulse toward self-destruction stirred him, based on self-contempt and a sensation of life's futility. But when he reached the hotel at Mt. Abu he was saved from blowing out his brains by the same kind of three-in-the-morning courage that had stiffened him in the Argonne; only now the courage had to do harder work, because he had no one dependent on him for leadership and encouragement. It was the loneliness that made life so abominable.

He decided not to remain at Mt. Abu, so he gave his horse away, a little puzzled by his own distaste for selling the animal,

and went to Delhi, footloose and without the slightest interest in life. He wondered why nobody noticed him, but supposed that was due to his own morbidity; not many people like to talk with men whose faces betray their inner gloom, and he could not throw off the gloom. He could not read. He could take no interest in world news. It occurred to him to try what drink could do for him; but he could remember plenty of fellows who had tried that.

"Just another form of hypnotism. Why go from bad to worse?"

So he cut out drink entirely, and then tobacco, lest reliance on them should tempt him to drop deeper into life's illusion. If he should ever again believe that all the evil in the world was real, then he knew he would blow his brains out. Why not? What use living in a world where one's good is another's evil, and vice-versa?

An English doctor, noticing his depression, struck up an acquaintance and suggested various amusements, such as tiger shooting, pig sticking, or polo; but it was not until he casually mentioned cholera at Benares that he drew any response.

"I leave tonight. I'm drafted," said the doctor.

Charlie brightened.

"Then I'll go too," he announced. "I've had some training. I can obey orders. They can probably use a volunteer assistant to do detail work."

"Nothing nice about it," said the doctor. "Dangerous—"

"Suits me."

So Charlie took the train that night; and because Benares was crowded with pilgrims, and the epidemic was the worst in twenty years, the short handed medical staff accepted his offer without a moment's hesitation. He was given charge of a disinfecting squad, and he carried his life in his hands for days and nights on end because many of the more ignorant Hindus actively resented interference with time honored dirt.

But he remembered the mental attitude that he believed had brought him un-

scathed through the war in France, so he tried it again. He stuck to the idea that nothing except mass hypnotism had produced the cholera, and he refused to be hypnotized. He stuck to the same idea when an indignant Hindu downed him with a long stick; and though it took him three days to recover, he attributed recovery to his own line of thinking, and not to the medical aid he received.

After that, he was given a worse job, in the improvised cholera camp, and it was no time at all before he caught the cholera, which is a ravening disease that kills a strong man quicker than a weak one. He was actually given up for dead, and they would have cremated his body if a native orderly had not seen his eyelids flutter. But he was more than ever convinced that it was all illusion, because he distinctly remembered every detail of his almost dying. He had seen himself, as it were, objectively. He had looked on at his own pain, although he had been helpless to banish it.

Recovering slowly—wasted almost to a shadow of himself—he still refused to believe that the experience was real. He refused to believe it even when they told him he was unlikely ever to recover his full strength and packed him off to a convalescent hospital in the mountains.

There the doctor to all intents and purposes ordered him out of India as his only chance to recover some part of his health. As soon as he was strong enough to travel he was sent to Bombay, where another doctor advised him to go home to the United States.

"India is no country for a man in your condition, Major Grover."

"But neither is the United States," said Charlie—and grew silent.

He could not bear to speak of his wife and child who had not met him when he came back from the war. He did not in the least mind the prospects of dying, but he did not want to lose his reason. Home? The mere word filled him with misery such as he knew he could not endure.

"You have money? All right. Try England then. They'll talk your lan-

guage. Look for something to amuse you. Try horseracing, or anything else that will take your mind off yourself."

"England will do," said Charlie.

So they carried him aboard a liner and he spent three miserable weeks at sea endeavoring to like the company of thoroughly likable men and women who were all looking forward to going home. Not one of those was lonely, and not one was less than good natured; but he neither enjoyed their jokes nor the thought of ever meeting them again, and he declined several invitations. However, his health improved in cooler latitudes and by the time he reached England he was well enough to feel the need of occupation.

He even thought of buying a farm, and for several weeks he traveled all over the South of England looking for one, until it occurred to him that if he bought a farm it would tie up his funds and perhaps prevent him from returning to India when the two years were up and it was time again to meet the *guru*.

He returned to London; and because hotel life was unendurable he established himself at a boarding house in a middle class street in Mayfair.

There he felt less lonely. At least twenty people dined at the long table every evening, and the majority were as gloomy as himself, some suffering from hard times, others from the drab monotony of tasks in city offices.

Without exactly realizing it, he warmed toward folk whose lot seemed hardly better than his own and began to be interested. They were not companionable people, but they needed something that he felt he could give; and at dinner they seemed to like to listen to his opinion about hypnotic illusion, although most of them laughed at it.



LITTLE by little three or four became more intimate. They discussed their own private affairs, until at last a man named Staples touched on business. It transpired that Staples and three others hoped to form a partnership and to persuade

another man, named Griggs, to join them; but Griggs was doubtful of their united ability to finance their share of the undertaking. Griggs was a man of means, and cautious, if not suspicious. He was disinclined to hard work, and frankly in favor of letting partners do that for him. Furthermore, he liked the idea of real estate development. But he did not enjoy running risks.

Staples artfully and very gradually outlined the proposition to Charlie, who perfectly understood that he was being angled for. He had no objection. If the project was on the level, and sound, why should he have? He needed occupation, and he had plenty of money lying idle in a New York bank. So he made careful inquiries and found that Staples, Griggs and the three others had business records that were not remarkable but certainly unblemished.

Life seemed less dismal when he entertained the thought of helping these men, and he knew he could give them the benefit of American ideas. So when Griggs bluntly intimated that the deal could go through provided Staples and his friends raised an extra ten thousand pounds, Charlie offered the money, in the form of a loan secured by mortgage. In addition, in return for his advice and personal service, he was to receive a sliding scale percentage of the profits.

He had named stiff terms, expecting to have to reduce them; but Staples and the others closed with him so eagerly that he began to doubt the wisdom of his offer. However, the money did not matter much; he had plenty more, and nobody dependent on him; and he was not the kind of man who backs down lightly, once he has pledged his word. So he signed the agreement and sent for the money, he and Griggs agreeing privately together to keep a close eye on the business; Charlie was to watch the field work, Griggs the office.

From then on, Charlie threw his heart into the work and enjoyed some phases of it. He was irritated by the incompetence of Staples and the other three; and now

and then Griggs angered him by being too suspicious. Side whiskered, middle aged, pompous, the senior partner was too lazy to do anything but find fault; and now and then, of an evening, when Charlie met Griggs in the office there were hot words that were sometimes overheard by Staples and the others.

Staples' thin lips and aquiline nose used to twitch and his eyes looked furtive on those occasions, but Charlie set that down to dread of the senior partner's frequent threat to exercise his rights under the contract and demand repayment of his money.

However, on the whole the undertaking prospered, and it was months before Charlie suspected there was something crooked going on. Even then he was unable to detect what it was, although he had the accounts examined by a public auditor and questioned all the partners narrowly, including Griggs, who took offense at it and there were high words again, Griggs being one of those fools who assert an exclusive right to be suspicious. Staples overheard the quarrel and reported it to the other partners.

Then, as usual when baffling conditions presented themselves, Charlie fell back on his theory of hypnotic illusion. He decided he had made a mistake by believing in the reality of these men's problem and by being drawn into its orbit. True, it had given him occupation, and for nearly a year his fits of gloom had hardly touched him.

But now, along with the growing conviction that his partners were crooks, despair returned and regret marched with it, so that Charlie, recognizing symptoms, knew he must either break loose from his environment or die.

It seemed simple enough. All he had to do was to cancel the mortgage and assign to the other partners his share of the prospective profits. He supposed ten thousand pounds was a lot of money to give away to men whom he distrusted and disliked, but that seemed better than to remain in association with them. He ignored the ungrateful greed with which they accepted his gift; and he put himself

to no great trouble to examine the receipt they gave him, or to notice that the envelop, into which it was tucked, exactly resembled an empty envelop beside it on the table. He was glad they did not offer to shake hands with him when the conference was over.

Then, in his room at the boarding house, he sat down to review the situation and decided that the root of the illusion from which he suffered lay much deeper than he had been willing to perceive. The fact was, as he saw it now, that he should have faced the trouble on its home ground. He had run away from the enemy. Perhaps the *guru* had refused to receive him as a *chela* because of that.

Perhaps he had postponed an interview for two years simply to provide an opportunity, meanwhile, to go home and conquer his weakness. That might be the *guru's* test of his inherent character. It probably was, since there was nothing—absolutely nothing—that Charlie dreaded more than to revisit the scenes of his former happiness. But he knew, from hearsay, and from thinking about it logically, that no genuine *guru* would accept a *chela* without first testing his moral courage to the utmost limit.

Charlie knew that his physical courage had withstood trial, and he did not doubt that the *guru* knew that also. He had not shirked, going over the top; he had not flinched from the cholera camp. But he would rather face both of those horrors again, day after day for two whole years, than go home and revive the memory of wife and child, and of the homecoming after the war. If it only were sorrow he had to face. But it was worse than sorrow—emptiness—utter negation of hope—a sense of impotent rebellion against a heartless, soulless, sickening illusion.

"I will go," said Charlie.



HE WAS nothing if not a man of action. He immediately booked a passage for New York, spent a whole night packing and destroying letters and caught the next day's steamer. He stiffened himself.

He tried to regain the spirit that in the war in France had saved a thousand lives and brought him a few moments' fame. But a gloom and a dread descended on him that were worse than anything he had yet experienced.

Even the Atlantic seemed to share his mood; there was a moaning ground swell in the English Channel, and the open sea was shrouded in sunless fog when it was not storm ridden. It was a luckless voyage. A passenger died and was buried at sea. The ship was three days overdue. The wireless bulletins posted daily in the smoking room reported nothing except disasters—storms, wrecks, earthquakes, revolution, bank failures . . .

They quarantined in fog, exactly as on the day when the troopship had brought Charlie back from France. New York was invisible now, as it had been then. The difference was that on that day Charlie had been looking forward to meeting his wife and child. This time, he knew nobody would meet him, and when a tug drew alongside he eyed it without curiosity, merely because it was something to look at. He was startled out of melancholy by the approach of his cabin steward.

"Two men want to see you, sir."

The steward backed away. Two men in heavy overcoats stepped forward briskly.

"Are you Major Charles Grover?"

"Yes. Why?"

One of the men undid his overcoat and displayed a police badge.

"I have a warrant for you. You're to come to police headquarters. The tug's waiting."

"Warrant?"

The man with the undone overcoat opened it again sufficiently to show the upper edge of a folded paper protruding from the inside pocket.

"What am I charged with?"

"Murder. But they'll read that to you at the office. If you come without making a fuss we won't put handcuffs on you. Just step lively and don't try any smart stuff, that's all. Some one else will see

about your baggage when the ship docks."

Murder! It was almost funny. It was almost a relief from the morbid misery of homecoming to a home that held nothing but heartache. It was at any rate something to think about—an accident, of course—mistaken identity—or somebody might have been using his name. It should be easy to disprove such a charge. There was probably no need even to engage a lawyer. The less fuss, the less likelihood of headlines in the papers. It was another plain case of illusion; he would not increase it by taking it seriously.

People who had hypnotized themselves into believing such a ridiculous lie could best be dehypnotized by being left to find out its absurdity themselves. But Charlie, as he walked between the two detectives to the tug, did wonder why he, of all men in the world, should be the chosen victim. Why should reasonable things not happen to him, as they do to other people?

He was staggered when he reached police headquarters. He was charged with having murdered Griggs in London, and he was to be held without bail pending the arrival of extradition papers. There were hardly any particulars, but some one showed him an Associated Press clipping from a morning paper, from which it appeared that Griggs had been found shot dead in the early morning of the day on which Charlie left England. The financial affairs of Griggs, it seemed, were not in order and his business associates had supplied the police with the name and description of an absconding partner who was thought to be en route to the United States.

"The place to face this is in London," said Charlie. "Can I waive extradition?"

Scotland Yard men were already on their way to fetch him, so he had to sit in a cell and await their arrival, denying himself to reporters and hoping that none of his former friends would hear of his predicament. It would be unendurable to have to face the suspicious generosity of men who probably would rally to his aid from charitable motives.

He would rather hang than taste their

charity. He had deserted them, ten years ago, because he suffered too much in their company, and he sincerely hoped they would ignore him now. They did. Perhaps none of them noticed the few lines about him in the papers that were filled with sensational news.

The strange thing was that Charlie felt obsessed by a foreboding that disgrace and death were unavoidable. He knew that was illusion—knew it was hypnotic—due, in part at any rate, to the atmosphere of a police headquarters cell in a row with a number of prisoners, not all of whom were likely to escape the penitentiary or execution. In silence, eating almost nothing, and refusing to answer even the doctor's questions, he struggled mentally to master the illusion—to destroy it—to look forward with a laugh to being vindicated.

But by the time the Scotland Yard men came and the formality of his surrender to them was completed he felt doomed. He felt unclean—incapable of making himself look clean to the eyes of normal men and women. It was not that he felt guilty of a crime; of course, he did not. But he felt foully sick, like a leper. He accused himself of spiritual filth that made him a fit target for what others might call misfortune but that he knew as simply the sequence of cause and effect.

Like begets like. Evil begets evil. As above, so below. He remembered all those time worn platitudes, and every one of them became a mocking index finger pointing at his impotence to shake himself free from the lies of illusion; until he was ashamed, at last, that he had even dared to try to find a *guru* and to offer himself for *chela*-ship.

Then deeper depths. He had to share a stateroom with the men from Scotland Yard, who took turns to stay awake in four-hour watches. They were decent enough fellows, and as considerate of his feelings as they could be, but he could not force himself to talk to them. One of them gave him a New York daily paper—a tabloid, printed on the day of his departure. It devoted two whole pages to him.

They had dug up his photograph, his parentage, his military record, his citation for the medal of honor. Worse, they had found pictures of his wife and child and published those, along with an opinion by an alleged psychiatrist that probably his grief at losing them had so unhinged his mind as to make him capable of murder. There were comments on his silence, and on the fact that he had refused to engage an attorney. There was an imaginary picture of him seated in a barred cell with his head between his hands, above the caption: "Stricken from the roll of honor?"



THE two men from Scotland Yard watched him incessantly after that for fear he might commit suicide. Used though they were to human misery they had seen nothing to equal his. His very dumbness overcame their will to comfort him in any way they could, so that in self-defense they tried rougher tactics; but they could not even get him to resent their remarks. Since he refused almost all food, they brought the doctor to him; and the doctor expressed the opinion that he, was feigning madness to escape the gallows.

Charlie, who overheard the opinion, knew that he was not mad; and it was typical of him, that when the time came to instruct a lawyer he insisted that in no event should a plea of insanity be raised in his defense.

They lodged him in prison in London; and with the usual speed of English justice he was charged before a magistrate with having murdered Herbert Stanley Griggs with a repeating pistol (placed in evidence). At his own request, and at his own expense, a solicitor was introduced to him, who entered a formal plea of not guilty, and the magistrate committed him for trial, that day three weeks, at the Old Bailey. The solicitor retained a barrister, and a fight for life began that to Charlie, at first, seemed too simple to be taken seriously. Even long conferences with the solicitor failed to convince him that he was in danger, and he so resented the re-

peated hints that he should enter a plea of insanity that he at last insisted on examination, at his own expense, by three medical experts, who pronounced him sane.

Charlie's opinion that Griggs had been murdered by Staples or one of the other partners was of no value whatever to the defense. The case for the Crown was as simple as twice two. Somebody had forged Griggs' signature to a note for twenty thousand pounds, and if Charlie's indorsement of the note was a forgery it was such a good one that even he could detect no flaw in it. The note had been sold to a third party, who purchased it in good faith, and the forgery of Griggs' name was not discovered until the day before Charlie's sudden departure for the United States. The repeating pistol that killed Griggs was one that Charlie admitted having brought home with him from India; having no use for it, he had presented it to Staples, but Staples denied that.

The contention of the prosecution was that Charlie, having forged the note, had made a confession to Griggs, who had accepted the ten thousand pound mortgage in partial repayment but had insisted on an immediate settlement of the balance. It was argued that Griggs' threat to prosecute unless that full amount was paid immediately had so terrified Charlie that he shot Griggs dead, and his sudden flight to the United States was cited as an indication of his terror.

The document signed by Griggs, Staples and the other partners, acknowledging Charlie's gift of the ten thousand pound mortgage and the surrender of his claim to a share of the profits, would have been valuable evidence. But when Charlie hunted through his papers he discovered that the envelop that he had picked up that day from the office table was the wrong one; it contained only a blank sheet of paper.

After that, it made no difference that he knew he had been framed by Staples and the others—that Staples had forged that note and the indorsement—and that

Staples or one of the other partners was the actual murderer. His knowledge was not demonstrable in court. He knew that Staples intended to swear his life away; and he had not one friend in all England who could come forward and give him as much as a good character.

The trial lasted less than a day, before a judge and jury, who, as usual, gave the prisoner at the bar full benefit of doubt and rather more latitude in his defense than he was entitled to by law. Charlie had no witnesses to call, but he took the stand in his own defense and simply denied all knowledge of either the forgery or the murder. Under cross-examination he admitted he had nothing to show in corroboration of his account of having withdrawn from the business because of a suspicion that the other men were dishonest; and he had to admit, too, that his story of having gratuitously surrendered his mortgage and share of the profits was, to say the least of it, fantastic.

In the end, Charlie's barrister made a speech for the defense entirely contrary to Charlie's wishes, in which he stressed the probable effect of drumfire on a soldier's nerves. That practically amounted to a plea of guilty. The speech for the Crown hardly amounted to more than a review of the evidence. And the judge summed up so flatly against Charlie that the jury was only absent twenty minutes before returning a verdict of guilty.

Solemnly then, with a cap on his head, the judge sentenced Charlie to be taken thence and, that day six weeks, to be hanged by the neck until he was dead; and might the Lord have mercy on his soul.

Then friends appeared—unknown ones—altruists—too sentimental to achieve much in the face of law. An appeal was taken, contrary to Charlie's wishes; but there was no new evidence and the report of the trial disclosed no errors; the appeal was promptly thrown out. Then societies for the abolition of capital punishment, and dear old ladies, and some officers who knew Charlie's war record applied to the Home Secretary for com-

mutation of the sentence to life imprisonment. Cablegrams were received from the American Legion and from former friends in the United States. Charlie was examined by a commission-in-lunacy. But he preferred death to life imprisonment, so he came out of his morbid silence and was at great pains to convince the commissioners of his perfect sanity, although now he himself doubted it.



HIS whole theory of illusion and mass hypnotism seemed to him to have destroyed itself. He had stuck to it to its grim conclusion. And the theory was wrong. If this was true—and how could he resist the truth of it?—then it was true, too, that his wife and child were an episode—a mere contrasting, mocking touch of happiness to make life's cruelty more poignant. He was glad, at any rate, that they were actually dead and might not see, and feel and grieve over his shame.

He had been mad to set out on that search for a *guru*. Granting, as it might perhaps be, that a *guru* truly does know more of life than other people do, why should a *guru* waste endeavor on a man incapable of facing facts? Should he go to a *guru* to learn that misery is misery and death is death? Should he go to a *guru* to learn that life is cruel and consists of one—not illusion, but disillusion following another? Death now—death by a rope, at the hands of a hired man in a jail-yard, for a crime that no earthly inducement could have forced him to commit.

Innocent? Of what? He had been innocent of common sense. Well, death was a fact that he had to face now. He would face it, a bit tired, but without dread or hope.

No, he was wrong there. He would hope to meet his wife and child. If it was true they had died, it was true they had lived. If death was an eternal fact, so life must be. If drumfire was a fact, and cholera, and murder; if lies and treachery were facts; if hanging was a fact; then life beyond the grave might be as true as any of them. He determined he would die

accepting that fact and expecting others, equally convincing but less cruel.

He denied himself to the prison chaplain, because the chaplain wished to speak of theories, whereas hard, inescapable facts had become now the basis of Charlie's philosophy. He was converted to them and, like any other convert, he was more intolerant of heresy than any old believer is. But he saw the solicitor again and made his will, bequeathing all his money to a fund in the United States for the defense of friendless prisoners. It was his last gesture—to provide what little concrete help he could, for a few of the victims of fact.

When the day of execution came he almost welcomed it, smiling at the irony of circumstance. It was two years to the day since he had sat before that *guru*. Had it been the real *guru*, or a *chela*? He suspected it was the actual *guru*. Well—no matter, that was a closed chapter.

Preferring to die fasting, because he feared that a merciful doctor might have drugged that last meal, he refused to touch the special food provided for condemned men. He intended to face death fully conscious. He would at least look that fact in the face. He submitted to being pinioned in the cell and marched out to the gallows, without speaking to any one; and he ran up the steps of the gallows so quickly that the executioner hurried after him for fear he meant to cheat the noose by jumping off the platform.

He was interested in the executioner. The man's face seemed familiar, although Charlie could not remember where he had met him before. It seemed important to remember this—no reason why, unless perhaps in order to rid his own consciousness of the least trace of resentment. It would be an undignified and dirty business to die hating any one. He thought that if the executioner should speak, perhaps he might identify him; he might be an ex-soldier—some one he had met in Flanders. So he asked the executioner if it was against the rules to be allowed to die without the black cap.

"I prefer to face facts."

"Why not?" the executioner answered.

It was strange, but the man's face grew more and more familiar. Perhaps the beard was confusing. Or was it his eyes? He arranged the noose around Charlie's neck and then—anticipation probably—there began to be a singing in Charlie's ears and his eyes swam, as if the noose were tighter than the executioner had intended it should be before springing the trap. The executioner seemed far off. His eyes looked larger—his beard longer—he seemed lower, as if he had stepped down and was waiting for some one to tell him to pull the lever.

"Now for it. Get it over with!" said Charlie.

"Now? What time is it?"

Charlie glanced down at his wrist watch. He was seated on the chair under the tree before the man on the mat. The birds were singing. And the man's face was that of the executioner, only its harshness was gone and it looked more humorous.

"It is two minutes past midday," Charlie answered, and then checked himself bewildered. "Am I dead?"

"Does it seem so?" the other asked him.

"How did I get here? Are you not the *guru*?"

"I am he whom you were seeking," said the other.

"And it's two years to the day since—"

"Two years! Nay, two minutes. Did you not say that you can protect yourself against hypnotism?"



OPEN SEASON

By

JOHN C. FROHLICHER

1918

The mallards would fly low a day like this—
 Green headed honkers dropping through the rain;
 And teal would come down, bullet-swift.
 (Hear the artillery, again!)
 It's five o'clock, and Fritz is waiting there . . .
 I wish those shells were mallards, in the air!

1930

It's almost twice as wet as Bois Argonne,
 And— Keep your head down! Mallards to the right!
 Why don't I shoot? Good God, man, I—I can't—
 I killed a frightened German boy, twelve years ago tonight.

*A Story
of the
West*



BACKFIRED

By W. C. TUTTLE

OLD Frank Shea sagged heavily in a barroom chair, head down, arms limply at his sides, his two booted feet planted solidly. Old Frank was drunk; had been drunk for two hours. He didn't get drunk often but, as he said himself, when he did get drunk he made a job of it.

Three noisy cowboys came clattering in and lined up at the bar. Two of them were Bill Shea and Oscar Shea, sons of Old Frank. The third was Shag Shirey, who worked for the Circle S, owned by Shea. Bill turned his head and observed the old man.

"C'mon an' have a drink, paw," he invited.

The invitation penetrated the old man's brain, and he got shakily to his feet. Thus he stood for several moments before sinking back.

"Paw's got a snootful," observed Oscar, who was half drunk himself.

"Face the barrier, you old rannie," ordered Bill.

"Yuh-huh," grunted the old man.

He got up again, but was unable to move forward. The experience seemed to sober him, but he sank back into the chair again.

The cowboys poured their drinks and turned to the old man.

"Comin' up for a snort, paw?" asked Oscar.

"I can't do it," wailed the old man. "I jist can't do it."

"Mus' be in ter'ble shape," said Shag. "Any time he can't git up to have a drink."

"I'm par'lyzed," wailed the old man. "Can't move m' feet, an' I can feel her creepin' up m' laigs."

Bill spilled his liquor in his anxiety.

"Now, paw, you stan' up an' try hard," he said.

Old Frank got up and essayed to move his feet, unsuccessfully, and he sank back, whimpering a little.

"I ain't got no power left," he choked.

"My Gawd, this is awful!" declared Bill. "Oscar, you git a livery rig right now, an' I'll pack him out to it. He can't ride no horse, par'lyzed thataway; an' we've got to git him home. You feel it creepin' on you, paw?"

"Yeah, I feel her plenty, Bill. Mebbe I won't last to git home."

"Mebbe you won't, but we'll start, paw. Now, you jist take it easy, an' I'll pack you. No, you lemme do all the work."

Bill picked him up gently—and left Old Frank's boots right there on the floor in front of the chair. In fact, he lifted the old man right out of them. Bill caught sight of a foot with a wrinkled sock, turned and looked at the two boots.

He deposited the old man none too gently on the floor, grasped one of the boots and gave a mighty tug. His hand slipped loose, and the boot remained. Bill straightened up and looked around. He hooked both thumbs over his cartridge belt and announced in no uncertain voice:

"There's only one sure way we can ever feel safe around here an' that's for somebody to kill that damn sheriff. Nailin' paw's boots to the floor!"

"Bill," quavered the old man, "was that one of them impractical jokes he's allus pullin' off?"

"You an' your creepin' paralysis! Let's have a drink."

Down in the sheriff's office, Windy Wilson, the sheriff, sagged down in an old

swivel chair, his booted feet slanting up to the top of his spur scarred old desk. Bat Ear Butler, his deputy, was telling about Frank Shea's paralysis; and both men were shedding tears of mirth over the incident.

An' Bill was so damned mad," choked Bat Ear, "that he jist dropped poor Uncle Frank on the floor, an' made a grab at one of them boots. An' he dang near fell over backwards when the boot held!"

The two officers whooped with unholy mirth. Practical jokes were meat and drink to Windy Wilson, and he had an able ally in Bat Ear. Windy was a good sheriff. He had proved it any number of times; but people were afraid of him because of his jokes. No one was safe.

"Anyway, I keep folks from gettin' rusty," said Windy. "You can't set around here an' grow sprouts."

Windy was even funny to look at. As Bat Ear said, his bones all grew straight up and down, like a bird cage, with just enough projections for him to wear clothes and not have to nail 'em on. He was very tall and very solemn, with the features usually associated with undertakers or foreign missionaries.

Bat Ear was short and fat, with fan-like ears, over which he had uncanny control. He had been christened Adelbert, which had faded away in the cow country.

Windy's original name had been Cornelius, but this, too, had been forgotten. Sandy City appreciated Windy as a sheriff, but they looked askance at anything he did outside actual official business.

On the same afternoon, after the Shea outfit had gone back to the ranch, a stranger rode into Sandy City. And what a stranger! Windy took one look at him, and a devilish expression flashed across the sheriff's face. A dude cowboy! Bat Ear saw him too, and came down to the office. They merely looked at each other and nodded.

Windy buckled on his gun, drooped his hat over one eye, and they sauntered up to the Cowboy's Rest Saloon, where the stranger had dismounted. But before they reached there he came out and led

his horse down to the livery stable. Oscar Wylie, the bartender, looked shrewdly at the sheriff and deputy.

"Was that Buffalo Bill's fav'rite nephew, Oscar?" asked Windy.

"You name it, Windy." Oscar grinned. "I never seen nothin' like it, an' I've looked upon 'em a long time from this side of the mahogany. Mebbe I'm wrong, but it looks t' me as though another young man has gone West. Hair pants! Who ever seen hair pants in Arizony? Two guns, almost new. An' I'll betcha that there Studson hat cost sixty pesos, if it cost a dime. He sa'nters in here, an' I takes one look at him. I says, 'You better put your bronc in a stable an' feed him somethin'.' You see, I didn't know what else to say, an' I had to say somethin' or start laughin'; an' I'll be a liar if he didn't turn right around an' go out to his horse."

"An' led him down to the stable," added Bat Ear. "Let's have a drink before it gits back here."

It was ten minutes before the man came back, walking awkwardly on high heels, and fairly kicking the legs of his heavy wool skin chaps ahead of him; beautiful, curly, pink tinted wool skin. The man's shirt was of blue silk, his muffler a bright cerise; and the double cartridge belt was of the newest, yellowest leather ever seen in Sandy City. His boots had yellow pansies on them, and the butts of his two guns were of selected mother-of-pearl.

The man was of medium height, possibly twenty-five years old, his round face peeling from sunburn; and his blue eyes were as innocent of guile as those of a babe.

"Welcome to Sandy City, stranger," said the sheriff solemnly.

The man smiled and nodded.

"Pleased to meet you. I—er—have a drink—all of you."

They had the drink. The stranger smelled suspiciously of mothballs.

"Goin' to be with us long?" queried the sheriff.

"No; only tonight. You see, I—I'm touring."

"Yea-a-ah? Seein' America first, eh?"

"Exactly."



WINDY WILSON was puzzled as to what to do. Here was his big opportunity to play a joke on a tenderfoot, and he didn't know just how to frame it. The stranger looked around the place.

"Do you play cards here?" he asked.

"Yeah, we play a little," drawled Oscar. "You play?"

"I used to play a little euchre."

"Uh-huh. Well, we don't play much of that, Mr.—er—"

"Folks back East used to call me Windy."

"Windy? Well, I'll be darned! That's what we call the sheriff!"

"Ain't that funny?"

"Lotsa fellers has been called that," said Bat Ear. "The sheriff got his from talkin' too much."

"I never did!" snapped the sheriff.

"Well, I guess I got mine from not talking enough." The new Windy smiled.

Bat Ear bought a drink, after which he and the sheriff wandered down to their office. The stranger hobbled across the street and entered the hotel.

"Well, now," said the sheriff, "I've got to do some thinkin'. Huh! Give me that old bundle of reward notices, Bat Ear."

Slowly and methodically he went through the accumulation of years, searching for just the right description.

"You got a idea, Windy?" asked Bat Ear, when the sheriff had finished his search.

"Well, here's a old one we might use, Bat Ear."

"Hell, no! That's a reward for Kid Ewalt."

"Well, what of it?"

"He's been in the penitentiary for over a year."

"All right—this fried aig don't know that. C'mon."

They went over to the livery stable and looked at the stanger's horse. It was a tall, reddish roan gelding, branded on the

right shoulder with a JP. The sheriff studied the brand and grinned slowly.

"Bat Ear," he said, "you've bragged what you can do with a razor. How long will it take you to alter that JP to an OB?"

"You mean to hair brand the alteration?"

"That's what I meant."

"Won't take but a few minutes, Windy. What's the idea?"

"I'm goin' to scare seven years' growth out of that hair panted tenderfoot. I'll shore send him tourin' real fast. You alter that brand, an' I'll do the rest."

A little later the sheriff went up to the hotel, and on the old dog eared register was scrawled a name which the sheriff was unable to decipher. He could make out Philadelphia, but that was all.

Bat Ear finished his job of alteration, and the sheriff decided it was good. A close investigation would prove that it was faked; but there would be no close investigation.

There were several men in the Cowboy's Rest Saloon when the sheriff and deputy came back. The new Windy was there, and the sheriff looked him over seriously. Suddenly the sheriff drew a gun and shoved the muzzle against the stranger's belt.

"Stick your hands up!" he snapped.

The stranger jerked convulsively, but up went his hands. Bat Ear deftly removed his guns and stepped back.

"I arrest you for stealin' an OB horse," said the sheriff.

"An OB horse?" queried the stranger in a weak voice.

"Stolen from the OB outfit yesterday—the horse you rode in here."

"Why—why, that horse is a—a JP horse."

"Don't make me laugh. Watch him, Bat Ear."

The sheriff drew out the old reward notice and read it through, lifting his eyes occasionally to study his prisoner.

"Yeah, it fits you pretty danged close, feller," he said finally.

"What fits me, Sheriff?"

"This here reward notice. You look a lot like Kid Ewalt."

A quick smile of understanding creased the faces of those in the little audience. Kid Ewalt was serving time for train robbery; a hard riding, very young devil, who had played a lone hand.

"Well, I—" the stranger swallowed thickly. "What are you going to do with me? I'm—I'm all right."

"Do with you? Huh! Why, I'm goin' to put you in a nice strong coop, feller, an' then I'm goin' to send word to the OB outfit, sayin' I've caught you with the goods. An' I don't mind tellin' you that the OB outfit usually hangs horsethieves. Of course, I'll do my best to protect you; but they've done took five thieves away from me in the past year. C'mon."

There was nothing for the stranger to do except to go with the sheriff.

"What won't Windy do next?" laughed a cowboy. "OB outfit! Hell, there ain't no OB outfit in this State—not that I've heard about. What'll he do to this feller—jist scare him plenty?"

"He said he was goin' to make a tourist out of him." Bat Ear laughed. "Prob'ly let him escape, an' we'll watch him snap his shirt-tail off gettin' out of the country."

And that was exactly what the sheriff intended doing. He brought over a tray loaded with food from the restaurant that evening, and when he left the cell, he forgot to set the spring catch on the cell door. He knew his prisoner would find it unlocked, but he also knew that the prisoner would not leave until well after dark; so he and Bat Ear went to the livery stable, where they would get a fair view of the prisoner's escape.

"As soon as he starts, we'll shoot holes in the air," chuckled the sheriff, "an' then we'll wire Mesquite Springs to look out for a whirlwind goin' through."

They sat on some hay in a vacant stall beside the misbranded horse and waited for the big escape. Nine o'clock passed, ten o'clock; but no sign of the escaping prisoner. Eleven o'clock passed, and they dozed.

"Midnight," whispered Bat Ear. "Don'tcha reckon the dang fool found out that the door was unlocked?"

"Well, I can't go over an' tell him, can I?" growled the sheriff.

One o'clock passed, and it grew chilly in the draughty old stable.

"Aw, hell, I'm goin' to bed," declared Bat Ear. "You better go over an' kick the dang fool out of the jail, Windy. This is one joke that didn't take."

The sheriff yawned heavily and got to his feet.

"I must have been asleep," he said.

"Hell, we was both asleep, Windy. That horse is still there. It's up to you to tell him you made a mistake, an' let him loose."



THEY went over to the office and walked in. Bat Ear lighted a lamp on the sheriff's desk, and noticed that all the drawers had been pulled out, the contents scattered about.

"Did you take that new .30-30 off that rack, Bat Ear?" asked the sheriff.

"Well, I'll be damned!" snorted the deputy. "What's been goin' on around here?"

Some one stepped heavily on the porch, and they turned to see Oscar Wylie, the bartender of the Cowboy's Rest Saloon.

"Where in hell have you been?" demanded Oscar. "I've been huntin' all over for you."

"What for?" asked the sheriff.

"What for? Didn't you know the saloon had been held up?"

"Held up?"

"Yeah, held up! One man done the job. Got three hundred dollars an' a couple quarts of whisky."

"The—the stranger?" croaked Bat Ear.

"Na-a-a-aw! This feller wore a black sombrero, and he had on a pair of chaps somethin' like yours, Windy. Had big silver conchas an'—what's eatin' you?"

The sheriff sprang to the little closet where he kept his riding clothes, flung aside the old calico curtain and stepped back.

"They're gone!" he said.

"Yeah, an' so is your belt an' gun," added Bat Ear.

The three men looked at one another for several moments and, as if by mutual consent, they ran out, circled the jail and flung open the sheriff's stable door. The sheriff's sorrel and saddle were gone.

"Wh-which way did he go?" panted the sheriff.

"He—he said he was tourin'," reminded Bat Ear.

There was no use of pursuit. No man knew which way he had gone; so they went to bed. The next morning about ten o'clock, three men rode into Sandy City. One was Jim Partridge, owner of the JP outfit, and the other two were strangers.

Windy knew Partridge, and shook hands with him.

"You don't git down this way often, Jim," said Windy.

"No, I don't, that's a fact, Windy. Meet Harris an' James. I've been tellin' 'em about you."

"About me?"

"Yeah, about the jokes you play on folks. We come past the Circle S, an' Bill Shea was tellin' us about you nailin' the old man's boots down. Pretty good! I tell you how I happened to come down. A couple days ago a feller stole a red roan geldin' of mine from a hitch rack in Nugget. Nope, I didn't have no idea who he was, 'cause he lifted the horse while I'm playin' poker. That same night somebody busted into a store an' swiped a lot of gaudy cowboy stuff that was ordered for a dude ranch they're startin' near Nugget.

"Along comes Harris an' James, an' we kinda puts two and two together, an' starts tryin' to hit the trail of somebody wearin' gaudy clothes an' a-ridin' on a red roan JP geldin'. So far we ain't had no luck."

"What didja mean about—along comes Harris an' James?"

"They're a couple boys from the penitentiary. You remember Kid Ewalt?"

"I—I didn't know him," said the sheriff huskily.

"No, you didn't. They took him in a northern county. Well, he broke out of the penitentiary several days ago, an' they thought he might have headed down this way."

"I reckon we was wrong," said James. "Ewalt is too smart to go where we think he might."

"Yeah, I reckon he's plenty smart," sighed the sheriff. "You goin' on down to Mesquite Springs, Jim?"

"Yeah, I believe we will. An' then we'll prob'ly swing north to Clayton an' over the ridge to Nugget. An' if a feller answerin' that description shows up, don't play no joke on him, Windy; jist grab the son of a gun."

"You're damn right!" snorted the sheriff, and watched the three men ride out of town.

Slowly he walked up to the front of the hotel, where Bat Ear was leaning lazily against a post.

"Wasn't that Jim Partridge?" asked the deputy.

"Yeah."

"What's he doin' down here?"

The sheriff removed his hat and mopped his brow thoughtfully.

"I didn't ask him, Bat Ear. Wasn't inquisitive."

The old hotel proprietor came out to them.

"What become of that fancy son of a rooster?" he asked. "Signed my register an' never come back. Somebody said you played a trick on him, Windy; an' I jist

want you to know I don't appreciate it none. You can't run business away from me with your—"

"I didn't play no trick on *him*," denied the sheriff. "He jist pulled out, tht's all."

"Uh-huh. Well, it looks damn funny. What about that feller that held up the saloon last night?"

"I guess he done pulled out, too."

"Prob'ly scared you might play a joke on him. Anyway, I wish I'd made that feller Urstuck pay in advance."

"What was his name?" asked the sheriff.

"He said it was Urstuck. I tried to read it on the register, but he wrote so danged funny. Said it was spelled U-r-s-t-u-c-k, an' his first name was Windy."

The old man went back into the hotel. Bat Ear wiggled one ear thoughtfully and looked at the sheriff.

"Urstuck," he said softly. "Windy U-r-s-t-u-c-k. He-e-ey! Don't you git it?"

"Git what?" asked the sheriff.

"That name! Windy Urstuck! Windy, you are stuck!"

"Well, the dirty sidewinder! If I ever git my hands on him, I'll make him—"

"Can'tcha take a joke?" asked Bat Ear.

"Listen, Bat Ear," said the sheriff earnestly. "From now on, this sheriff's office is serious business. If I catch anybody playin' any more jokes—"

"I'll shoot you dead," finished Bat Ear.

"Check!" snorted Windy.



Beginning a Novel of the



CHAPTER I

A SCENTED WARNING

LIEUTENANT COUNT OTHO woke with a start from disagreeable sleep. Plobo's feet had been noiseless in crossing his master's chamber. He took pains against sound as he opened the high casement windows to admit the morning sun now high over Vienna. But the mere presence of some one in the room had been enough in Otho's present tension to bring him from that fevered tossing in which he had spent the hours since midnight.

At finding himself awake, Otho groaned inwardly. The reality to which he had

awakened was even more wretched than the jumbled misery of his nightmares. He closed his eyes lest the faithful Plobo see that he was awake. Otho had no present wish for bath, shave, or breakfast. He wished only to be alone while he mulled once more over last night's event. And there were many things to be reasoned today.

When Plobo was gone from the room, Count Otho brought from under his pillow the letter that had been handed him last night as he was entering his carriage at the Burg Theater. This letter brought matters to a climax. He sniffed at it with a meditative scowl. There was in its folds a scent that identified its writer in

Wars of Napoleon



By **ARED WHITE**

Monsieur le Falcon

to remember he is the witless tool of another whose fickle heart has been inflamed by the Countess Zita. Be cautious, my Lieutenant, lest you find yourself plucked for a French goose by your dear cousin. Trust more to your eyes and senses and I will not have warned you in vain.

Otho's mind even more vividly than his fleeting glimpse of the woman as she passed the envelop clandestinely into his gloved hand. Fräulein Teschen was in the service of that rat eyed intriguer, Colonel Vekuss, henchman of the mighty Thugutt, favorite of his Imperial Majesty, Francis.

Coming from that woman, the letter was not to be tossed aside, no matter what its purport. The Black Cabinet of Vienna did nothing without motive.

Otho read it hastily, then scanned it again and again, weighing each word as he read:

My Lieutenant: You may feel excellent cause for jealousy of the Russian, Perov. But please

There was no signature. A footnote asked that he destroy the letter by fire and placed him on his honor against betraying its contents to superiors. Otho held it to his nose again before crumpling it. That scent, associated always with the fluffy gowns of Fräulein Teschen, invariably permeated the official quarters of Colonel Vekuss, major-domo of Baron Thugutt's Black Cabinet.

Otho lay back and glared at the vaulted ceiling. There was a dull pain across the front of his head from the abominable passions in which he had tossed off the night. As he tried to think now, sought to fathom what sinister reasons might lie behind this warning, his emotions flung him out of bed to a restless pacing of the richly carpeted floor, his eyes ablaze, his lips drawn taut across his teeth.

Violent passion was a new experience in Otho's life, leastwise this jumbled maze of fear, suspicion, hate of the mysterious agencies that had thrust themselves these past months into the even tenor of his carefully regulated, lavishly ordered life. Once before he had been stirred to hate, a lasting, penetrating hatred, though too impersonal, too remote, to steep his mind in real bitterness. It had been a hatred of that Corsican upstart who led a Jacobin army to crush Austria's forces in Italy and thus strip from Austrian control the major rich estates of the house of Donau-Walden in Lombardy. A mere ruffian, that Corsican, of whom little was known except that he signed his orders Bonaparte and had the devil's own genius in tactics and the maneuvers of battle.

But the Corsican had passed from Otho's mind of late. Today's passion had been brewing in his soul for months, a slow growth fed by vague suspicions and restless intuitions, now brought to a head by the mysterious letter of warning. He asked himself many questions. Why had his brigade marched off to Italy without him for the recent brilliant victories against the French that had upset that Corsican's work and wiped out the disgrace of Campo Formio? Why must he dawdle about Vienna as aide-de-camp to an Austrian general who was in the field without him? Why was he put off with oily evasion each time he inquired of Colonel Vekuss at the palace when he was to receive back his rich estates in Lombardy, now that victory perched once more upon the Austrian eagles?

Why was his cousin, the Captain Baron Ferdinand of Waldengaden, accepted in high favor by Thugutt's Black Cabinet when Ferdinand was branded a card cheat and a roué with no zest for duty at the frontiers? And why, moreover, was the dashing Russian subaltern, Perov, held at Vienna with no other apparent duty than to dance attendance upon Otho's young wife when the other Russian attachés long since had gone to their regiments?



TIME and again in past months he had scoffed down these taunting questions as absurdities, idle shadows having no substance. But now they seethed in his brain, touched into burning reality. Did some mysterious power move against him, seeking to entangle him, through the Countess Zita, in nefarious meshes?

But if so, what the power, what the motive behind it? He reminded himself that he was not in open disfavor at court. Even the arrogant young emperor, in his worst fit of ill temper, would hesitate to assault the house of Donau-Walden without some strong reason of state. As for the premier, Baron Thugutt, that rascal's intrigues were on too broad a scale to bother with some lesser nobleman's affairs, even one whose hereditary estates were among the richest of all Austria. Colonel Vekuss, the premier's left hand man, often had twitted Otho upon the French blood that ran in his veins. Yet Vekuss had always shown a hand rubbing friendliness. And Vekuss was kept busy with the great intrigues of state, with Thugutt's vast machinations with the mad Czar Paul, and in spying upon the French.

Fräulein Teschen's veiled reference to his cousin Ferdinand was even more mystifying. Ferdinand was capable of anything. There had been something of bitterness in his taunts at Otho's French ancestry. Ferdinand, heir to a mere barony, had shown, from boyhood, sharp envy of Otho's rich estates, of Otho's inherited dominion over a principality which gave him the right to be addressed as Highness by his lessers. But so far as Zita was concerned, Ferdinand had never shown the slightest interest in her, was wholly unaffected by her beauty, in fact had passed out veiled sneers at her Hungarian origin. Of whom, then, was Perov the witless tool? Did truth or trick lie behind the woman's warning?

As Otho, pacing back and forth for the better part of an hour, found only an impenetrable veil, he finally drew himself together, freed his mind of the tangle

with an effort and rang for Plobo. Events must develop further, he decided. Already he had laid his plans for Perov. The ball which Zita had planned for the château on the second night thereafter might bring the Russian's purposes to the light. Otho's teeth bared in a grim smile at this prospect. He had laid a deft trap for that night. He would not be at the ball, and yet he would be there. Thus his eyes might see many things of interest.

Plobo brought in water for the morning shave, then a hearty breakfast of *ben-schel* and coffee. There was something very soothing to Otho in Plobo's presence, so that his servant's ministrations, together with breakfast, set him in a better humor and relieved the dull ache of his brain.

A servant of unusual talent, Plobo. He spoke no word this morning until Otho had eaten, then softly asked him at what hour he wished his horse and falcon. It was thus that Plobo always guessed his master's moods and wishes.

"You have read my mind again,ascal." Otho smiled. "Now see if you can tell me which falcon today, and which mount."

"The bay hunter," Plobo replied at once, "and the large falcon with the white breast and yellow legs."

"It is no longer safe for me to have thoughts, Plobo, when you are about," Otho bantered. "Now, come, tell me what I am thinking of next."

"That I must be making haste if we are to be ready by ten," he replied.

Otho arrested his faithful man of all tasks with a movement of his hand. His face sobered, and he looked thoughtfully at Plobo for some moments.

"Plobo, have you noticed anything very unusual in my mind of late?" he asked, a note of hesitation in his voice.

Plobo nodded gravely.

"You have had any idea of what might be wrong, Plobo?"

The other turned pale, the muscles of his face tightened. He nodded again, without speaking.

"It is because I am not in the field with the Archduke Charles?"

Plobo shook his head vigorously. Otho sat looking at him, as if uncertain whether to say more. A final question was trembling on his lips. Of all men he could trust Plobo, a man something more to him than either mere servant or military henchman. A man of unprepossessing appearance was Plobo. His cheekbones were very high and his small, deep-set blue eyes seemed to have a cold, sinister sort of glitter in their depths; and his mouth with its thick straight lips suggested prowess and stubbornness rather than servility. Though his body had a straight set-up from his service with the Hungarian Szekler Hussars, to which he had been attached by Otho while they were garrisoned in Italy prior to Campo Formio, the thickness of his upper torso was disproportionate. Added to this deformity were the long, powerful, gangling arms which had won for him among his comrades of the Hussars the nickname of Gorilla.



AN UNSOCIABLE fellow Plobo had been accounted in the Austrian Hussars, and a dangerous one in a brawl, with an uncanny accuracy in the throwing of a knife. The hotheads of the cavalry had always given him a wide berth, not merely because he was servant to an aide-de-camp of the general, but because of his ability to care for himself. But under that blunt, uncompromising exterior was a prodigious loyalty for the young Count Otho, a loyalty that knew no limit.

In common with Otho he was half French—the best half, he was fond of barking back at the Austrians who taunted him in barracks of his French ancestry. His mother had come to Vienna from Paris with the French bride of the elderly Count of Donau-Walden, Otho's mother. Unlike Otho, his tie to polyglot Austria was not the young emperor. Rather it was Otho, whose wishes were his law, whose country was Otho's remaining petty estates in the Tyrol and Otho's

baroque château in the environs of Vienna.

A sense of this tie passed through Otho's mind as he sat looking at Plobo. The thought that was in his mind could not be put in words, not even to an intimate, much less to a retainer. But if Plobo had knowledge, that was another matter.

"You know then what it is?" he asked at last, his voice dry and hollow.

Again Plobo nodded, his eyes on the floor.

"And it is—something which I can not mention to you or any one else?"

At Plobo's uncomfortable nod of affirmation, Otho snapped his fingers.

"Bring the horses," he commanded. "I will be ready at once."

As Plobo disappeared toward the stables, Otho passed quietly through the château to the small gardens. The Countess Zita was yet sound asleep. They would be back from the hunt before she had stirred herself and been made presentable by her Russian maid. He was grateful for this since he had no wish to meet Zita until he had composed himself so completely that no hint of what was in his mind might reach her intuitions.

At sight of his hunter and the hooded falcon on Plobo's arm, a milder light came into Otho's eyes. He lifted the hood and looked approvingly at the blinking glassy orbs of the bird, stroked its fluffy neck and flecked at its sharp, hooked beak. On mounting his superb bay gelding, he took the bird from Plobo on to his own gloved wrist and rode off toward the open woods that skirted the Danube in the distance.

The warm sunshine, the chatter of birds, the rise and fall of his splendidly gaited thoroughbred, the bite of talons in his gloved wrist, the presence of Plobo trotting close behind, these revived his heavy spirits. He rode at a swinging trot until they came to a bridle path that led into fields and woods, then Otho broke to a canter, a gallop, then a full gallop. Only action could wear down the restlessness that stirred in his veins. He slowed

down at last, his mount covered with lather, and dismounted to set out on foot for quail. At flushing a covey of birds, he whipped the hood from the falcon and cast it adrift. The bird made a few lazy over-wings and returned to his shoulder. A second cast brought no better result.

"So-o-o!" he chided. "You are getting fat and lazy, are you?" A sudden smile lighted his face. "Or is it that you wait for bigger game?"

An exclamation came from Plobo, who was pointing in the distance. Flying well in the air, parallel to the Danube, was a small flock of herons. At sight of them Otho vaulted into his saddle and rode like the wind until he came under them, fortunately well clear of the torpid river. Again he cast the falcon, and this time it rose in the air like a rocket, winging its way straight at the herons which flapped desperately upward and scattered.

Singling out a victim, the bird of prey rose over it, maneuvering for position until it was sure of itself, then dropped like a plummet straight upon its quarry. The two birds, bound into a single mass of struggling claws and feathers, dropped to earth. Otho, with Plobo plunging behind him, raced to the point of fall. The heron was dead when they reached the place of landing, the victor standing proudly beside the carcass. Plobo, at an order from Otho, drew out his dirk and cut out the heron's warm heart which he tossed into the alert beak of the falcon.

There was a cold, thoughtful sparkle in Otho's clear gray eyes and he turned back into the woods. He rode now very slowly, holding back his chafing hunter with a firm wrist. His brain was clear, the restlessness had subsided, and there was a smile on his fine, close lipped mouth. But it was not a pleasant, happy smile. His whole face seemed to reflect a grim resolve. As he reached the grounds of his château again and dismounted, he lifted the hood from his falcon and stroked its head.

"Magnificent!" he exclaimed. "You played a waiting game, my friend, for something worthwhile!" Otho's smile

thinned. "From you, *liebchen*, I have learned a great lesson—to wait until the right hour, then strike high, straight and hard. And I shall have for my reward the black heart of a precious knave!"

CHAPTER II

AN INTERRUPTED RENDEZVOUS

WHEN Otho joined the countess under the arched beeches in the garden for the midday meal, he was in full control of his emotions. He complained mildly, as was his habit, of being held in Vienna while the Hussars reaped glory in Piedmont, then yawned over his quail and wine, and chatted of the frivolous things that were the life of his caste in Vienna. The bored nonchalance with which Zita stared at him out of her large brown eyes, the indifference of her conversation, told him that she felt no hint of the change that had shaken him out of himself. To her he remained putty, some one to pay her extravagances, to ignore her flirtations, to insure her station in the military set that was close to the throne.

He leaned over to admire a brilliant solitaire that sparkled at her breast. A stone of three carats, blue-white, that must have cost a thousand florins.

"I saw it in the shops and could not resist it," she said languidly, looking him carelessly straight in the eye. "Do you not think it is beautiful?"

"Very beautiful," he said. "I am glad you were fortunate enough to find so beautiful and perfect a stone. It will add a touch at the ball tomorrow night." He smothered a yawn and changed the subject. "I needn't say that I shall be bored to death by the affair. I detest these silly mask affairs, but I presume I must suffer it through."

"Of course," she replied. "You must remember there will be important guests, including the Baron Thugutt."

"You consider that son of a fisherman an important guest, indeed?"

Zita shrugged and pursed her lips.

"At least he has the emperor by the ears, and if one should ever wish a favor, the good will of his Excellency is not to be jeered at. I have also asked the Colonel Vekuss for the same good reason."

"And the Lieutenant Perov, no doubt."

"To be sure."

She looked at him sharply but on his face was only that same old wry smile with which he invariably greeted the mention of the Russian attaché. He yawned again and sipped languidly at his wine.

"I must say," he suggested presently, "that when our guests are received, I may draw aside with some of my fellows and have a game of cards."

Zita shrugged indifference and Otho, finishing his wine, excused himself. He walked with luxurious indolence among the flowers, pausing now and again to stoop over a radiant dahlia, until he was out of sight; then he quickened his pace, left the château grounds and plunged along a bridle path into the woods.

His face clouded as he walked, his pupils contracted into burning sparks. By a superb effort he had kept in check the storm that had brewed during the brief instant his fingers had rested upon that blue-white diamond. Never had he questioned Zita's reckless extravagance but he had placed a limit upon her resources, forced to that extremity by the threat of bankruptcy. Since that wretch Bonaparte had seized Lombardy in the peace of Campo Formio, Otho's circumstances had been sorely cramped. The Austrian crown had failed to indemnify him for lost hereditary holdings in Italy. Even his trifling pay as a lieutenant of Hussars had been needed to see him through.

And since Zita's fortune long since had been squandered by her recklessness, he knew that it was not her florins that had bought that diamond. Whose, then? The question lashed him into an impatient fury. Not Perov. That impecunious rascal had nothing but his lieutenant's pay. Whose? Zita's beauty had commanded the flattery of many men.

But her flirtations had always seemed to him harmless enough, nothing more than the hunger of a beautiful woman for flattery, the flattery of male attention; until Perov came.

He conquered the tempest. The incident of the falcon rose before his eyes, and he forced a smile.

"Be patient, Otho," he said to himself grimly. "Be patient, and be most prudent until the hour to strike. There is something afoot, my dear Otho, to which I fear you have been most blind."

Plobo was waiting for him at an appointed spot; a small grassy clearance in the forest a thousand meters from the château. His hand was steady as he took from Plobo the sets of rapiers and sabers and tested their mettle expertly. He removed his velvet coat, rolled his sleeves to the elbow and launched into wrist strengthening exercises with the heaviest of the cavalry blades. Straight cuts at the ground, thrusts and cuts at the boles of trees, arrested by the strength of his forearm at the instant of impact, were followed by light fencing with rapiers.

"Sabers for strength, rapiers for speed," he exclaimed. "On your guard, Plobo!"

For an hour they fought, now with the heavy blades, now with the foils. Plobo was expert with either weapon, but small match for the agile Otho who handled the rapier with the speed of lightning, and was able to put something of that same devastating swiftness into the play of a cavalry blade. Otho threw himself into the workout with abandon today, forcing Plobo's guard, disarming him repeatedly, forcing him to give ground.

"The devil himself would be no match for you, Highness," gasped Plobo as he leaned panting against a tree for respite. Plobo's eyes gleamed approval of this. To his loyal nature it was as it should be that Otho master him. "Not even the Hungarian sword master, Captain Kurz, could stop your saber today."

Otho himself was breathing heavily. He shook his aching arm.

"But fat has been creeping into my arms and under my heart," he replied.

"It is high time we were taking ourselves in hand, lest we become flabby old women."



THEREAFTER, between sorties, Otho engaged in phantom wrist play each time Plobo paused to recover his breath.

The sun was dipping into the forests beyond the Danube, before Otho finally surrendered the blades to Plobo's care and took up his coat.

"You may hide them here in the forest, Plobo," Otho instructed, "so that when we go out to ride in the morning we may come here. I have my own reason for wishing this play kept to ourselves."

"I know where is a hollow log close by," said Plobo. "They will be safe enough there."

"A question, Plobo." Otho studied the ground in evident embarrassment, the subject to which he had turned a delicate and uncomfortable one. "You will serve champagne to the guests on the night of tomorrow?"

"If it is your instruction, Highness."

"You have sharp eyes, Plobo."

"When there is something I should see in your behalf, Highness."

"If there should be something you wished to say to me you might have much trouble in picking me out, Plobo."

The other smiled knowingly.

"But I am sure your best disguise would not fool me," he boasted.

"Nevertheless you must be certain. I shall change to the costume of an ancient minstrel, after the guests have arrived. Even when I remove my mask, my nose will be crooked, my hair fiery red and I shall not be known for reasons that I prefer not to put in words. But—if there is something I should know, you can pass the word when you bring champagne. A discreet aside will be enough. Do you understand just what I mean, Plobo?"

A solemn nod of the head was eloquent affirmation that Plobo understood not merely what Otho meant but the delicacy of the subject. With no further word,

Count Otho turned on his heel and started briskly back through the forest.

Night had advanced far enough to permit cooling breezes off the Danube to temper the heat of the plains of Vienna before guests began rolling up in their carriages to the Château of Donau-Walden. Zita and Otho received their guests in the costume of courtiers of the ill-starred Louis XVI, a delicate compliment to the Emperor Francis who yet burned for vengeance against those assassins of his aunt, Marie Antoinette. They made the merest pretext of masking since as hosts they must identify themselves.

With the first sound of wheels in the grounds outside, Zita threw off the bored indifference which she reserved always for Otho and became instantly radiant, sparkling with vivacity, a gay, neatly turned phrase for each arrival. Otho gulped at the transformation. Stale beer for his palate, champagne for Vienna, he muttered to himself. From a corner of his eye he caught the flashing diamond at her breast, and avoided her eye thereafter, smiling in simulated spirit as he received the guests, but keeping a sharp eye.

In keeping with the spirit of the mask, guests were escorted inside formally by a major-domo, borrowed for the occasion, who announced arrivals by the names they represented in their masquerade.

French royalty predominated, with a scattering of English, thus reflecting the Austrian Imperial ambition for the return of the throne to France, an aspiration to which the King of England was irrevocably committed in alliance with the Emperor Francis. Otho watched covertly for Perov, expecting that Russian to appear as some Muscovite hero. But Perov avoided the slightly strained feeling that was now growing up between Francis and the Czar Paul. No one appeared in the guise of a Russian hero, and Otho had concluded that the other's masquerade had escaped him when his startled ears caught his own name, Otho, to which was added, Count of Vermandois.

He flushed at the name. A subtle

thrust that might be intended to bring the powerful Frenchman of his name in contrast with the lesser house of Donau-Walden. The masquerader was in court costume, with a slightly curved blade at his side, an almost modern cavalry weapon sorely out of period. Perov lingered a long moment over Zita's hand, the high color in her cheeks, the glow of excitement in her eyes confirming to Otho the masquerader who bore the proud name, Otho of Vermandois.

Baron Thugutt came at the last moment, disdaining disguise, in a severely plain coat that needed brushing, smiling a curt response to Zita's effusive greeting, palpably bored by the affair but unwilling to deny himself the homage of exclusive Vienna. The baron's appearance caused a stir of excitement, even though the whole party had a feeling of wanting to hold their noses. An impossible interloper who should be hauling in fish on the river where Maria Theresa discovered him in a whimsical moment. But he was a man to be courted, to be made over, no matter what their inner thoughts, for his whisper in the emperor's ear could unmake the mightiest of them. The grizzled old baron paused only long enough to sip a glass of choice champagne and munch a handful of soaked prunes, which no thoughtful hostess failed to provide for him.



CLOSE behind Thugutt came his shadow, Vekuss. The colonel was decked out as James, King of Scotland, England, France and Ireland, a conceit which he carried out clumsily. Though his face was covered by a thin, cleverly executed mask of the royal visage, done in a thin, hardened wax by a Viennese artist of repute in such works, Otho identified him by the coarse bristling hair above his forehead, and by the top of his head which ran back at a sharp angle, somewhat like that of a wild boar. After Vekuss came Otho's cousin Ferdinand, dressed as an ancient Austrian courtier, and bowing stiffly to his hosts as he passed

on with an unfathomable leer in the depths of his cold gray eyes.

As the Hungarian orchestra struck up the music of the dance, Otho surrendered Zita to the masquerading Otho of Vermandois and quietly effaced himself. Going to his own rooms, he got out the makeup box which he had learned to use with great skill for his own amusement in private theatricals, and set to work. An hour later he returned to Zita's gay party, a man whom only the initiated Plobo might identify.

His mask was nothing more than a strip of pink damask set across his eyes. But the face underneath was not the face of Count Otho. His own finely molded nose, aquiline without being beakish, was now a long, prying nose, broad at the bridge—blunt and twisted at the end. His eyebrows were thick and slightly beetling, his straight, close lipped mouth drooped into a surly leer at the corners. The change, moreover, was so craftily wrought with the aid of fine brushes, translucent pigments and Viennese wax, as to deceive the closest observer.

The Hungarians were playing a waltz, to which many of the guests were whirling as they sang an accompaniment. Some had already gone to the gardens for a breath of air, a few of the men were gambling in another room. Otho cast a furtive eye about for Perov but did not locate him in the whirl. A moment later Plobo came up with a glass of champagne. As Otho took the glass, Plobo whispered—

"In the gardens to the north, by the zell flowers, Highness."

Otho's cheeks burned as he went on light feet to the place betrayed to him by Plobo. The rôle of eavesdropper was not to his liking. But he cast his scruples aside in the memory of that diamond, the note of warning, the determination to be at the bottom of whatever intrigue beset his way.

As he came close he caught Perov's voice. Perov was pleading in a low voice. Otho was conscious of disappointment that it was only Perov. That Russian

would be easy enough to dispose of. If Perov was at the bottom of it, it would be simple enough to break Zita of a silly infatuation. He stood for a moment, caught the word St. Petersburg. Perov was pleading his cause in French, Zita standing silently very close to him without reply, one of the Russian's arms about her shoulder.

Disdaining to eavesdrop further, Otho presented himself. The Russian stepped back with a startled exclamation, but recovered and bowed frigidly.

"Pardon, if I intrude," Otho said, revealing his identity.

Whatever her feeling may have been for Perov, Zita at hearing Otho's voice abandoned the fellow. She rushed to Otho's side.

"Otho, I'm glad you have come," she cried. "I came out for a breath of air and the Lieutenant Perov has conducted himself in a way that is most offensive."

"You may return to your guests, my dear," said Otho coolly. "I will attend to this fellow."

Zita looked from one to the other for a frightened moment, then took refuge in flight. When she was gone, Otho addressed Perov brusquely.

"I am sorry, Lieutenant Perov, that you find it necessary to leave my estate. Of course, I shall see you very soon again, and under proper circumstances?"

"As you please, Count Otho." Perov bowed.

"In the morning at sunup, then?"

"That is most agreeable."

"The weapons, Herr Perov?"

"Since I have the choice, my dear Count, I shall prefer to use my own blade."

"Excellent, Herr Perov, and I an Austrian saber. But please to remember the delicacy of our dispute. I can allow you but a single second, who must be one of great discretion, and there need be no surgeon. For my own part, I will come entirely alone."

"I will respect your wish in that regard, Count Otho."

"Then all is agreed, my Lieutenant.

And now shall I have my servant order your fiacre?"

"You are a most gracious host, Count Otho. But I will take care of myself." Perov's mouth twisted into a snarl and he added in a low voice but through closed teeth, "But will you be good enough to convey my sincere regrets to the charming hostess of this most delightful occasion, Count Otho?"

CHAPTER III

THE DUEL

A LANTERN held close to his face brought Otho from his sleep. The crowing of distant cocks told him day approached. He sat up quietly, smiling into the solemn face of Plobo, who was visibly ill at ease, then rose and dressed in the light civilian attire of velvet and silk that Plobo had laid out for him in lieu of the heavier Hussar uniform.

He was conscious of a feeling of exhilaration in his veins. This was to be his first serious duel. On his forehead was a long mottled scar from an affair of the rapiers of earlier days. But there had been no serious intent behind that brawl, and it had taken liberal doses of pepper to perpetuate that badge of man's stature on his brow. His brain was clear as a bell though there had been less than two hours of sleep since the last of Zita's noisy guests departed. He held his hand at arm's length and saw that there was not the slightest tremor in his fingers.

"Never before have I felt so completely fit, Plobo," he whispered gleefully to his servant.

The two tiptoed their way out of the sleeping château, Plobo carrying the sabers in his hands to prevent them from clanking. They proceeded noiselessly to a point on the highway where Otho had ordered his horse placed.

"But you will not need a mount, Plobo," Otho tersely reminded his servant at sight of two horses. "I told you my own horse, only."

"I could not permit you to look after

your own horse and your blades," muttered Plobo. "I will be very discreet."

"But I choose to go alone," Otho persisted. "I have allowed the Russian a single companion and no surgeon, and there is no one in Vienna to whom I wish to entrust the details of this affair. As for you, Plobo, your presence can not be countenanced in an affair between gentlemen, as you well know."

"But if you should be—be hurt, Highness?"

Otho gave a hard, dry laugh.

"There will be no question of a surgeon when this affair is ended," he said bitterly. "It will be to the finish, no matter how often I am wounded."

He paused, flashed his favorite blade from its case, and tested the strength and suppleness of his wrist.

"But do not fret yourself on my account, Plobo. There is the skill of fifty generations of swordsmen in my good right arm. Except for that tutor of Hussars, Captain Kurz, I feel myself able to attend to the best of them, and I've thought at times I might be able to account even for Kurz in a really serious affair."

Plobo muttered inaudibly and, as Otho mounted and trotted off, knelt in the road to ask the blessings of the saints upon his master. A good five miles of trotting intervened, a ride in the exhilarating morning air that put Otho in high fettle when he drew up under the shadows of the Wiener Wald and tied his hunter by its rein to the bole of a small beech. The first touch of red was over the horizon and the distant city was emerging from its ghostly pall when the pounding of hoofs heralded the arrival of Lieutenant Perov and his second.

The two rode up, Perov executing a formal military salute as he reined up and calmly dismounted. Perov wore his garrison uniform of the Dragoons, though his companion was in citizen's dress. Otho, calmly standing apart and waiting for them to secure their horses and approach, was conscious of something peculiarly familiar in the setup of the man

who accompanied Perov. There was a sharp squareness to the fellow's shoulders, a certain bristling quality in the movement of his erect body and slightly bowed legs that hinted of some one Otho knew. It was not until the man turned from his horse that Otho identified him. He gasped his amazement. Captain Kurz, tutor in swordsmanship to his Imperial Majesty's household, friend and mentor of Otho in the use of heavy blades; the last man Otho had expected to see as friend and second to the Russian.

But he offered no comment as Kurz approached him. The terms were agreed upon quickly. Each to fight with his own weapon, without rest or interval, until satisfaction was scored. Kurz obligingly remarked that he would represent the interests of both, since Otho was not accompanied, and therefore would intervene in the interests of either should he decide that satisfaction had been attained.

"My satisfaction must be complete and conclusive," said Otho grimly, and stepped back to position to draw his blade.

Lieutenant Perov came forward with an easy swagger, a smile on his face. But Otho observed that the fellow's skin was ashen, the smile forced. Also he caught a slight unsteadiness at the point of the Russian saber. Perov held the advantage of height, weight and reach, as well as in the length of his 33-inch Russian blade, a full two inches longer than Otho's weapon. The Russian blade was also thinner, had been honed to a keen edge from hilt to point, and the guards were lighter; a much faster weapon, skill and other qualities of the combatants being equal.



THOUGH Otho had been conscious of a tension in his legs, a nervousness, an uncertainty of what reactions might set in once he was in the heat of battle, all these symptoms passed with the first crossing of steel. The exhilaration to which he had awakened rose now to warm his blood like fine wine. His eyes glowed, he had a feeling of tremendous well being, a lusty

joy seized hold of him and seemed to direct his arm, his whole body, without conscious volition on his own part.

Without waiting to feel the Russian out, he plunged into an offensive in a furious, flashing sortie that sent Perov back desperately warding and fending. Otho's saber was sharpened only for a distance of six inches at the point, since he was depending upon speed, skill in the thrusts, a possible quick cut with the point of his blade. Perov, drawing his face into a sorry grimace, attempted to rally against the onslaught, but quickly yielded. Otho followed him now, his eyes blazing confidence. Perov's determined grimace yielded to a look of anxiety, then to stark fear. He gave ground rapidly, almost running backward in a broad circle, his whole energy thrown into a desperate defense.

Into this crisis, at a moment when Otho's eyes were searching an instant's vital opening over the Russian's heart or throat, there came a sudden unbelievable intervention. Captain Kurz appeared beside the Russian and flashed out his saber with a command that Otho desist. When Otho ignored the command, Kurz whipped his point forward and threw himself into the battle.

Otho sprang back with a gasp of astonishment.

"The meaning of this treachery, Captain Kurz?" he demanded.

"Back on your guard!" cried the Austrian, advancing. "I will finish the matter for Perov!"

The Russian, panting heavily but with his face now twisted in a snarl of rage, advanced close behind Kurz. Otho, momentarily paralyzed by this unbelievable situation, sprang back on guard barely in time to escape a long, deft thrust from the agile Austrian sword master. Then he heard a savage outcry, a raging snarl, as a figure leaped from behind him and attacked Kurz with a furiously slashing saber.

He recognized Plobo, estimated the critical situation, decided his own course of action and jumped into the fray all in a

decisive fraction of a second. He attacked Perov with a new fury, an almost incautious abandon. Intuitively he knew that Kurz would be able to dispose of the faithful Plobo in short order, that his one hope was to overwhelm the Russian and then turn to Kurz. Cut, right, left—thrust—cut, cut—thrust—thrust—thrust. His final thrust reached its target. Even before the Russian, shrieking his agony, had collapsed to the ground, Otho wrenched his blade and turned to join Plobo. His stubborn henchman was yielding ground before the indomitable Kurz, the captain following him with thrust after thrust that fell just a few inches short.

Running close beside Plobo, Otho shouted to his man to desist, and took Kurz's weapon upon his own blade. The sword master's eyes danced with the lust of battle as he found Otho before him. He leaped back momentarily to salute an impudent welcome, then attacked with something of the superior vengeance in which Otho had been able to handle the Russian. Several of the Austrian's sorties failed to break Otho's defense. But the sword master wore a confident smile as he moved back and forth on swift feet, his blade striking here and there with a vindictive vigor. Several times, Otho was compelled to yield. In twenty unrelenting minutes his wrist was commencing to tire. Kurz had the advantage of condition, added to his veteran skill in all types of combat. Also he had been fighting a full ten minutes less time than had Otho.

It was when Otho, infuriated by his own waning strength, threw his energy into a furious counter attack, that Kurz pressed home one of his tricks. With a series of parries he forced his way close, and with a sudden forward vault, shot Otho's point in the air, at the same moment pressing his hilt against Otho's guard with such force and suddenness that the weapon was sent spinning in the air.

In the brief instant that Kurz leaped back to thrusting distance, Otho might have turned tail and run, his one hope of escaping the blow. But no such impulse

came to him. It was not in the blood of a scion of Donau-Walden to cringe at death, to turn back upon a foeman. Coolly he saw his danger. Instinctively he gathered himself to leap forward, impotently, to die in attack. Then he saw Kurz's eyes start from his head, saw his foeman's hands clutch wildly at the empty air, saw the Austrian's saber fall from his nerveless hand. His eyes caught, in that jumbled panorama of swift events, a ribbon of red at the fellow's throat, the short, stubby handle of a protruding dirk. Kurz's hand fumbled for the knife as he drew it from the wound and sank to the ground.



OTHO leaned over the fallen man, lifted his head, tore the silk sleeves from his shirt and tried to staunch the spurting wound of a severed vein. But he quickly saw that the wound was fatal. Kurz, too, guessed that his moment had come, that he would bleed to death long before he could be gotten into Vienna. Kurz made a floundering effort to gain his feet as he caught the specter of death gripping at him. His eyes were distended with fear at the first death throes. Then, as his strength ebbed and he felt himself slipping, he lay back and accepted the inevitable.

"I ask your forgiveness, my Lieutenant," he gasped feebly.

"I forgive you most freely, Herr Captain," Otho replied, "though I had not known there was any quarrel between the two of us."

Kurz rolled his head from side to side in pain.

"I—but—obeyed my orders, Lieutenant Count Otho."

"Your orders, Herr Captain? But your orders are from the crown of Austria. Surely, you can not mean—"

The stricken man gave a convulsive shudder, his eyes became fixed and glassy. Otho shook him lightly, tried to hold him to life until he had explained those strange words.

"Herr Captain Kurz," he cried. "You

must rally your strength for a moment. You must tell me—"

His words froze on his lips. The sword master was dead. Otho rose, Kurz's last words pounding in his brain. What did it mean, this assault upon him by a brother Hussar? Past events, his assignment away from the army of Italy, the inexplicable warning from Fräulein Teschen, recurred to throw his senses in a jumble. Had he in some unknown way brought upon himself the ill will of the emperor? Or was he the victim of some unfathomed intrigue of his Majesty's Black Cabinet?

He turned presently to Plobo and scowled.

"Plobo, you should not have thrown that knife!" he reprimanded. "By the law of the code I was beaten, and it was not for you, my servant, to interfere. What will Vienna say of this, if it becomes known?"

Plobo's long jaw dropped. The code of gentlemen was always a mystery to him, a forbidden domain upon which he feared to trespass well knowing that Count Otho, of all men, held himself rigidly bound by those unwritten laws. He stood blinking in crestfallen misery until he managed to find his tongue.

"It didn't look to me like fair play, Highness," he muttered. "Two against one."

"But there was only Captain Kurz and he had beaten me," protested Otho. "There was the barest chance, of course, that I might have closed in upon him before he could deliver himself of a thrust. Did I not instruct you that you were not to come?"

"Forgive me, Highness," responded Plobo. He drew himself together and spoke more stoutly. "But I came because I feared treachery. I kept myself in strict hiding, Highness, until the two of them set upon you, whereupon I showed myself as the very treachery I feared appeared before my eyes."

"A whim, Plobo. What possible reason could you have had for expecting treachery?"

"A very good reason, Highness," Plobo held his ground.

"You mean that you received a warning?"

"Not a warning, Highness, but a feeling in my bones. Forgive me but I have not been—been blind, and my eyes have seen things they can not understand, though they fill me with fears."

"What do you mean by that? You have my permission to speak as freely as you wish, if you think there is something I should know."

Plobo squirmed and twisted in embarrassment, studying his feet as he shaped his words.

"It is nothing much, Highness, yet to me it seems everything. I fear things, I know not just what; something very close to his Imperial Majesty, I have feared; something far over my head to fathom. Every time the Colonel Vekuss comes to the château of an afternoon, I have that feeling."

"Colonel Vekuss? You don't seem to understand. He is despised in Vienna, yet for reasons of policy he is invited to many places. It is a mere discretion that we have him as a guest, though you must never repeat my words to any one."

"It is his visits when we are at the chase or in barracks, Highness."

"I did not know of that, Plobo. Of what are you speaking now?"

"I do not know," said Plobo, now floundering in his embarrassment. "But—but—I saw no good—in his calling at the château, Highness, when only the—the—her Highness—"

Otho laughed a brusque end to Plobo's sentence.

"That intolerable ass is always flattered by any discreet attention paid him, Plobo. But come, we must be riding away. Pick up your dirk and conceal it. This situation is most uncomfortable, but we are helpless to do anything other than ride off and leave things to shape themselves. Let us hope that when the bodies are found, Vienna will conclude that Kurz and the Russian fought between themselves to their death. Come, cheer

yourself, Plobo, and don't look so wretched. After all, it is done, and I suppose I should be grateful to you for saving my life."

CHAPTER IV.

THE BLACK CABINET

OTHO, instead of breaking his blade, as he would have done ordinarily, and casting it insolently aside, ran it several times into the ground to purge it of Perov's blood and carried it away with him, a bit of tell-tale evidence which he could dispose of later. The turn of events had thoroughly unnerved him, for he had no illusions of the consequences in Vienna should the apparent facts of the duel become known. He might tell his story to his heart's content, but who would believe that Captain Kurz had outraged all laws of combat, of which he was a principal exponent?

There might be no question of murder involved. Even if there should be, Otho might normally clear himself of such a charge. The mere fact that the bodies lay in the accepted spot for dueling would establish the fact that it was no mere assassination. But the causes of the duel would be brought out, to set all the idle tongues in Vienna wagging; and there would be no bridging the disgrace of having permitted a menial to intervene in the affair. As he reasoned these things, Otho's decision crystallized. He would hold his own counsel, and let circumstances shape whatever explanation might appear when the two bodies were found. Even the emperor's black police, Colonel Vekuss's best operatives, might find themselves baffled if they found the case of enough importance to warrant following the trail.

As he emerged from the open fields into a bridle path, he saw Plobo's horse tied in a thicket, and turned in his saddle to motion his servant to hurry. But at sight of Plobo, trailing him a foot far behind, he wheeled his horse and looked with puzzled eyes. Plobo was stumbling drunkenly, both hands clasped over his left breast.

Spurring his hunter back at a gallop, Otho vaulted to the ground.

"You didn't tell me, Plobo, that you were wounded," he cried. "Here, sit down with your back to that tree and let me see."

Plobo pulled himself together and shook his head.

"It hurts, but I can get home in good time," he muttered.

Otho took him gently but firmly by the arm and seated him.

"A disagreeable thrust, Plobo," he said anxiously. "Enough to put a good man out of action, and you didn't even let on."

"The Captain Kurz's aim was very poor, Highness," said Plobo. "He missed my heart by a good three inches, and went into a rage because I did not drop. But I could not have lasted much longer if you had not come, Highness."

"We will be fortunate if he has missed your lung, Plobo. Here, I will bind it, and you can rest in the thicket while I bring a carriage for you."

Plobo raised a weak but protesting hand.

"We must not leave a trail, Highness. I would not trust even the coachman to know I am hurt this day. I will ride on in very slowly."

"You will do as I say this time, Plobo." Otho helped the wounded man to his feet and led him to a shaded place under an oak. "You will lie there until I come with a conveyance, which I will drive myself. That is a wound for a surgeon."

"But my horse, it can not be left tied here, nor can your Highness be seen leading it to the stables," protested Plobo.

"A simple matter." Otho smiled. "We need only remove saddle and bridle and the horse will make his own way back."

Without further time for Plobo's objections, Otho vaulted into the saddle and galloped to his stables, where he had a team hitched to a closed carriage, in which he returned for the wounded man. Driving him to the château, he let it drop that Plobo had been thrown by the stumbling of his horse, then drove into Vienna

for a trusted surgeon with whom he had served in Italy.

The surgeon, a superannuated follower of the Hussars, examined the wound, measured the distance from the shoulder, tried to fix its course by pressure of his fingers and finally pressed his ear to Plobo's chest.

"It has missed the lung," he announced, when he had completed his diagnosis. "It is a clean wound, of a saber, and will heal itself in its own good time."

"But I want the best attention given," said Otho. "This is not a case like those in Italy where time so often pressed us. I want no pains nor expense spared, nor any risk of venom."

"Small risk of venom with a clean wound in a healthy man," said the surgeon. "But since you wish it I will treat it with the greatest care."

First heating a small quantity of oil of alders, he mixed in a small portion of treacle, set the concoction to a boil and cauterized the wound at chest and back. Next he prepared a dressing of the yolk of eggs, a portion of turpentine and a small quantity of oil of roses. Then he drew a large quantity of blood from the patient's right arm and pronounced him on the highroad to early recovery, without need of further attention, except an occasional change of dressing.

"I do not deserve such attention from so small a wound," grumbled Plobo when the surgeon was gone. "I had not meant to let on that I had been scratched."

"Scratch?" echoed Otho. "I have seen men die from lesser cuts. It is wise that we take no risks."

"But you are only risking yourself, Highness, by having the surgeon here and holding me in bed with a wound at such a time."

Plobo, at this thought, struggled to his elbow and would have got up had not Otho arrested him.

"I neglected to tell you, Plobo, that you have been injured by a fall from your horse. The surgeon, who is my friend, understands that you struck upon a sharp twig."

"It would sound better if I were up and about, Highness," Plobo persisted.

"You will stay in bed until you are better. It is my command, so let us not argue further."



A TAP at the door interrupted. Both men started at the sound, Plobo attempting to rise only to be forced back by his master.

It was a servant of the château who reported a visitor for Count Otho. With a final admonition to Plobo that he remain quiet until danger of infection had passed, Otho went to the reception chamber. He stiffened at sight of his cousin Ferdinand. The Captain Baron Waldengaden was in full uniform, a Hussar saber at his side. There was a note of gloating in Ferdinand's eyes that confirmed a chilling premonition that had swept Otho at the summons. Otho entrenched himself in his full dignity and greeted his cousin with a tart nod.

"It is desired," said Ferdinand, a drawling satisfaction in his words, "that the Lieutenant Count Otho report himself immediately with me to a destination to which I will direct."

"Very well, Herr Captain," said Otho with feigned nonchalance. "If you will tell me to whom I am commanded to report, and when, I will not need detain you."

"My orders, Lieutenant Count Otho," Ferdinand spoke up. "My orders are that I shall remain with you, in your presence, until you do so report."

Otho stiffened and gave Ferdinand a searching look.

"One would think I am some refractory man-at-arms, or a prisoner under charges from your conduct, Herr Captain!"

Ferdinand bowed slightly.

"It is not for me to debate over my orders, Lieutenant Count Otho. But I would urge that you lose no time."

"By what authority do you present yourself in this manner?"

"By the highest authority, Lieutenant Count Otho. I have come at the command of his Imperial Majesty, the

Emperor of Austria, King of Hungary."

Otho relieved the sudden tension of his muscles with a quiet smile.

"Of course, Herr Baron, I did not understand," he replied. "But I presume I may claim time in which to change to my uniform?"

"Yes, of course. I will attend."

Ferdinand stalked impudently after Otho while he changed to his Hussar dress uniform, buckled on his dress sword, and reported ready. Otho left the chateau by a side entrance at the north so that by no means might the curious Plobo see what was afoot. Ferdinand had in waiting a small closed cabriolet bearing the Imperial coat of arms. As they were stepping in Ferdinand paused.

"If the Lieutenant Count Otho wishes his orderly to attend him there is ample time," he suggested.

"You were so instructed, Herr Baron?"

Otho shot back.

"I was so instructed," Ferdinand confessed blandly.

"Well, we need waste no time," Otho rejoined. "My servant is slightly shaken by a fall from his horse this morning and I prefer to leave him behind for his own good."

The fine thoroughbreds trotted into Vienna, their trim legs beating the road with the precision of well oiled pistons. Ferdinand sat like a ramrod in his most official way, his eyes betraying a huge delight in the situation, but with lips frozen in discreet silence. There was a certain likeness of feature and figure between the two, and yet a vast difference. Ferdinand's eyes were a colder blue, his nose beakish, his head broad at the brow and blockish at the temples. Otho's nose was aquiline without beak, his features of a softer chiseling, and there was more definitely written in his face the characteristics of his French mother than of the house of Donau-Walden. Otho lolled back in the cushions, his mind busy. First sight of Ferdinand had hinted at the reason for this summons. The veiled request for Plobo had confirmed everything to Otho's mind. The morning's

duel was known already at headquarters.

The swiftness with which the tragedy had reached official ears disconcerted him, filled him with uneasy foreboding. Had it all been a trap? Had treacherous eyes observed the drama of the duel field? Otho had counted upon the passing of days before the bodies were found, after that the usual perfunctory investigation. He shaped his thoughts to meet inquisition, rehearsing his guarded replies to probable questions. A frank statement of the stark facts might clear him of official censure, except for the intervention of Plobo. Should that leak out, the code of honor would stand outraged, no matter what Otho's explanation. Even if he escaped the ire of the Black Cabinet, he would have to face the veiled slurs of Hussars and Dragoons alike.

And if, in some way, the affair was personally embarrassing or distasteful to the Emperor, there might be serious consequences, even though he be released without open censure. The Aulic Council, the major-domos, ministers and military lick-spittles of the Imperial court invariably made the Emperor's slightest whim of displeasure against an individual their cause for persecution. There were strange and devious ways in which they might strike even a young nobleman of ancient lineage. In the withholding of military assignment, in the matters of official recognition and precedence, in the spreading of malignant gossip, in a hundred sinister ways they could assail him under cover, until he reached a discredit and dishonor in the eyes of Vienna that was worse than death to a gentleman.



THESE fears gripped Otho as he saw the palace grounds loom into the foreground. He recalled that once before he had risked the Imperial displeasure. A mere expression of sympathy for the unhappy Frenchman, the Marquis Lafayette. The Imperial treatment of Lafayette had seemed to Otho unthinkable. Had not Lafayette fled from France because of

defying the ravishers of his country, who had baited him with the presidency of a French Republic? And when the marquis, stumbling by accident into an Austrian outpost, had fallen into the clutches of the Austrian crown, had he not been treated as an ordinary felon? Even held in solitary confinement in the worst Austrian prisons for no better reason than that months before, as commander of the French National Guard, he had done his duty by escorting Louis and Marie Antoinette back to the Tuileries?

More than once, in past months, Otho had wondered if his expression of sympathy might not account for his sorry presence in Vienna while the army reaped victory in Italy. As often he had dismissed it as improbable. His own loyalty to the Emperor, the service of his house through many generations, were not so lightly to be set at naught. And as for his French mother, the Comtesse Le Falconnier had come from Paris with the hearty approval of the Empress Maria Theresa, Francis' grandmother, so that the French blood that coursed in Otho's veins should hardly be held against him.

Arrival of the carriage at the palace cleared his mind of speculation. He drew himself together and followed the silent Ferdinand with fine dignity, fully composed, his faculties keyed to whatever delicate crisis was in store. But his poise was shaken when his escort took him direct to the chambers of the old spider Thugutt. As they entered the ante-chamber, Otho saw with relief that there were many functionaries awaiting an audience, which would allow him time to compose himself fully and study this turn of events. Ferdinand, however, without pausing, crossed straight to the baron's private entrance and was ushered in by a supernumerary without question or formality.

Baron Thugutt's head was bowed over his massive table which was piled high with official reports and documents of state. As the two Hussars took their place in front of him, he continued his study as if oblivious to their presence in

the room. It was some minutes before he finally lifted his eyes. Then his face brightened, and with a curt movement of his hand, he motioned Otho to a chair in front of his desk, dismissing Ferdinand with a glance.

The broad high windows immediately at Baron Thugutt's back put the full light of day upon the face of any one seated for interview, whereas the visitor, facing the light, had an imperfect view of the host's features. But Otho's keen eyes caught the unexpected humor of the Austrian premier, one of disarming friendliness, of a pleasant *tête-à-tête* over some matter of mutual interest and profit. In the depths of his blasé eyes, in the quality of his easy smile, there was not to be detected any sinister note, the slightest hint of equivocation.

"I am pleased to see you in such perfect health, my young friend," said Baron Thugutt. "A pleasant moment you afforded me last night at your delightful château, Count Otho."

"You are very gracious, Excellency." Otho smiled.

"The lovely countess, she enjoys serenity, I trust?"

"Thank you, yes, Excellency."

The Baron's face changed with the swiftness of a saber thrust.

"Coming to the business at hand," he snapped, "it is most unfortunate that you have brought a sorry mess upon the shoulders of his Majesty!"

This change of front did not shake Otho out of his self-possession. He replied calmly.

"To what does your Excellency make reference?"

"To a matter of state, of unhappy possibilities," Thugutt shot back. He leaned across the table and fixed Otho with accusing eyes. "Do I need tell you of the strained relations with the mad Czar Paul? Some sinister influence is at work to break his alliance with our cause. His field marshal, that wild barbarian Suwarow, is reported marching north from Italy, braying his contempt of the Austrian arms as he marches. Our relations

hang suspended by a thread—and at this critical moment—when his Imperial Majesty is bending every thought to hold the Czar to his alliance with us against France—you have dared to jeopardize the interests of your Emperor, Count Otho!”

“You have not said how, Excellency.”

Baron Thugutt leaned closer, his face flushed, his hand pounding an emphasis to each word as he ignored Otho’s parry.

“But his Imperial Majesty is not to be cheated in this magnificent hour of destiny, Count Otho! His Imperial star is rising. Heaven favors our cause and Vienna will yet rule over Bavaria, even though we have to surrender the Netherlands. The heir of Louis will return to the throne of France. Need I remind you of that godless opportunist, that scourge of hell with the devil’s genius for battle—Napoleon Bonaparte?”

Otho stiffened at mention of that detested name.

“A wanderer of the earth, a bird of passage with no point at which to land!” Baron Thugutt thundered. He laughed savagely. “When we have finished, it will remain for him to die in the desert, or at the end of a rope, to have his carcass picked by the jackals—if there be jackals with so depraved a taste. While he dreams in Egypt, dreams of India in the palm of his hand, our armies have covered themselves with glory in Italy. We have undone all his foul work and are the masters of Piedmont. And the French people are disgusted with themselves at having placed charlatans in the place of Louis. What does this mean, Count Otho? It means that the throne of France shall rise again, that out of the chaos we shall have all back that we have lost and it means, even above that, we shall have Bavaria at last, without having to surrender the Netherlands! Do you understand now, Count Otho, the mighty considerations of state that rest in the delicate balance of our Emperor’s destiny?”

Otho’s jaw had fallen at this recital; he

was pale as death at the baron’s charge. Did it mean that he was to be charged with jeopardizing such monumental interests by reason of his unhappy quarrel with the Czar’s mere lieutenant attaché at Vienna?

“But you have not disclosed, Excellency,” he replied with a show of composure, “in what sense I have offended so grievously.”

The baron underwent another swift transition, from passion to placidity. He lolled back in his chair, his face relaxing. As he spoke his voice was soft again, and there was a friendly smile on his face.

“We will not discuss that, my friend. I must not forget my friendly interest in you and the high affection in which you are held by his Majesty. It is this friendly interest that has prompted me to approve a plan that offers you a most extraordinary opportunity—one that more than wipes out any injury you may have wrought upon the Imperial good, if you but succeed. An odd turn of friendship, is it not? But such is the infinite toleration of his Majesty for those who serve him well.”

“It is always a great honor, Excellency,” said Otho, his spirit suddenly buoyant, “to perform any manner of service for his Imperial Majesty. I assure you it has been very difficult for me, an officer of Hussars, to mark time here in Vienna, while there is a man’s part to be played in the field of honor.”

“A fine spirit, Lieutenant Count Otho.” Baron Thugutt rubbed his hands and his smile broadened. “I envy you the opportunity that will be yours this day, my young friend. In making your decision, you will please to remember the extraordinary circumstances, your own very deep obligation to repair past damage, and the urgency of the situation. As to the details, I have nothing to say. You may report now to Colonel Vekuss, whose brain conceived this mission for you. The best of fortune attend you, Count Otho.”

CHAPTER V

MONSIEUR LE FALCON

FOR the better part of an hour, Otho cooled his heels in a heavy, somber chamber that led into Vekuss's private headquarters. There was no one else in the room, not even a door flunkey or guard. But as he waited a significant scent caught Otho's nostrils. The exhilaration in which he had left Baron Thugutt slowly gave way to a sickly premonition. That scent identified Fräulein Teschen, recalled the mysterious warning he had received from her. Now, in some vague way, that warning seemed to associate itself with the events of the day, with the morning's duel, with his presence here. He tried to close his mind to such thoughts, to laugh them off as a fantastic trick of his nerves. But they persisted. Otho was pacing the room to relieve the tension when the outer door opened and Fräulein Teschen entered.

She hurried across the room toward Colonel Vekuss's inner chamber, seeming unconscious of Otho's presence until she was passing his chair, when she paused with a show of surprise. Otho rose and bowed stiffly when she spoke to him, concealing the sharp curiosity which the woman had incited by her message of warning. Heretofore he had known her chiefly at a distance and by the whispers of titled Hussars who told strange stories of her service as an agent of Austria. It was Fräulein Teschen who went on secret missions to Russia, to Italy, even to Paris and London, often disguised as a man, it was said in discreet circles close to the crown. There was a story that Vekuss once had assigned her, in male uniform, as the aide-de-camp to an Austrian general who had never suspected the ruse during months in the field; another that she had fought a duel with pistols at Moscow with a querulous Muscovite dragoon, whom she had wounded.

But Fräulein Teschen's present appearance gave small hint of such rôles. She was petite of figure, her features well molded, vivacious and essentially femi-

nine, her large brown eyes level and intelligent without boldness. A gown of flounced muslin and large mauve bonnet tied with broad ribbons at her chin gave her a coquettish touch at the moment more suggestive of a Vienna drawing room than the field of honor or a secret mission abroad in masquerade.

Fräulein Teschen extended her hand, which Otho took with little relish and bowed, a second time, without speaking. He started at feeling the pellet she pressed between his fingers, and resumed his seat calmly as she walked on to the colonel's door. There she hesitated, turned away abruptly without rapping and left the room. Otho picked up a book, thumbed through its pages, and guardedly unfolded the tiny wad of paper the woman had passed him.

Leave Austria at once for neutral country.
Take Countess Zita with you. You have no other hope. Please to destroy this note.

Slowly, Otho tore the warning into small bits and crossed the room to sift the fragments into a waste basket. The premonition assailed him again. But he had only a brief minute with his thoughts before the inner door opened and a uniformed flunkey ushered him into the presence of Colonel Vekuss.

Unlike Baron Thugutt, the premier's master of secret operations was harried by no preoccupations. He rose politely at Otho's entrance and invited him to a chair. When the visitor was seated he had a decanter of rare wine brought in and gossiped lightly while they drank.

Otho, though appearing to fall in with the other's easy mood, was searching Vekuss in calculating appraisal. Heretofore he had dismissed the man as merely misshapen and ugly. Now he caught the sinister quality of the fellow's features; of that broad, sharply sloping forehead which he had always associated in his mind with the head of a wild boar. The Vekuss nose was long and very blunt at the end, reaching to his thick, sensuous mouth with its hint of an eternal sneer. His eyes were large, blasé, slightly protu-

berant and a watery gray, their changeless expression masking the thoughts that lay behind them, even when Vekuss pretended to laugh.

The premier's left hand man changed the subject with that same disconcerting suddenness that Thugutt himself had used.

"So you thought it necessary to kill the Czar Paul's little friend, Lieutenant Perov, this morning?" he inquired.

Vekuss did not raise his voice, or change his tone. His face remained expressionless, as if he inquired of some perfunctory routine matter. Otho had steeled himself for some such thrust and met it serenely.

"Why do you say that, Herr Colonel?"

"And having thus offended the Czar Paul, you thought it necessary to affront your own Emperor by killing his good Hussar and servant, Captain Kurz; is it not so, Count Otho?"

"There is no reason why I should admit having killed Captain Kurz," Otho replied, stiffening slightly. "I was given to understand by Baron Thugutt that you wished—"

"*Himmelkreuz donnerwetter!* Perhaps, also, you will deny then," Vekuss cut in, "that your servant, the fellow named Plobo, threw his dirk into the captain's throat at your instigation, Lieutenant Count Otho."

"Naturally, Herr Colonel, I deny all rumors which you may repeat. But do I understand that you charge me with these matters?"

"I merely wished to come to an understanding, my dear Count Otho. Before I can do that we must be frank with each other. Are you ready to admit, in order to save time and complications, that you killed Perov and that your servant killed Captain Kurz this morning?"

"I will say this, Herr Colonel. If any one was killed this morning, as you affirm, it was in honorable duel. As for my servant Plobo, you must omit him from the conversation."

Vekuss refilled the glasses and leaned back in his chair.

"Perhaps, since you do not wish to be frank with me, Count Otho, I had better interview the fellow Plobo himself."

"But you will find, Herr Colonel, that my servant is confined to his bed from a severe injury sustained in falling from his horse. He could have no possible interest in this affair."

The colonel rose, crossed to a high vaulted window and laid hold of the portières.

"A most unusual statement, Count Otho, since your servant has been patiently waiting for you the past hour or more in the courtyard."



OTHO started as he saw Plobo seated outside, his arms crossed covertly over his saber wound, his eyes riveted expectantly upon the door through which Otho must emerge. Vekuss dropped the curtains and returned nonchalantly to his chair.

"If necessary," he announced significantly, "we can interview the knave. We have a way of making all such speak for themselves."

"You would learn nothing from Plobo," snapped Otho. "Not even if you skinned him alive to loosen his tongue."

Otho's boast stirred Vekuss to a snort of contempt.

"We have yet to fail, Count Otho. I shall demonstrate to you as soon as I can have him brought in; and in the meantime, perhaps you would lay a wager of say a hundred florins? Your judgment of the wretch against mine?"

Otho gulped, and as Vekuss reached for a gong to summon an attendant, motioned the other back into his chair.

"Let us see if we can not come to a better understanding, Herr Colonel," he countered. "I hold a rare sentiment for a faithful servant and can not tolerate seeing him tortured. Let us suppose that I have admitted everything you charge, what then?"

"An equivocal admission will not serve, Count Otho. We must deal in facts before I go further."

"But as I have said, if these men were

killed, there was no foul play for which I am responsible, Herr Colonel. The Emperor himself would condone my actions if I but told him the whole truth."

Vekuss indulged in a disagreeable chuckle.

"His Imperial Majesty, I must remind you, has neither time nor taste to listen to minor details of hot blooded disputes, Count Otho. The pertinent fact, as his Majesty will see it through my official eyes, is that you have wrought great damage upon his Majesty's present aspirations of state by reason of an undisciplined brawl with the Czar Paul's representative."

"Do you deny the right of a gentleman to uphold his honor in honorable combat, Herr Colonel?" Otho demanded hotly.

"Please come to earth, my Lieutenant!" Vekuss rejoined with a touch of temper. "We are not dealing in abstractions. You compel me to be very candid with you. There will be no facts except those that we choose to give his Majesty. I needn't tell you that he will be infuriated, and we will be compelled to abandon you to that fury unless you are more reasonable."

"You are saying that you will fan a fire in his Majesty's breast that is to consume me!" Otho rose and glared defiance at Vekuss. "Perhaps his Imperial Majesty will enjoy having me recite to him that you hold him so much a puppet as that?"

"Puppet if you wish! I even dare to say that Baron Thugutt is the state, that his wishes are above the law. Repeat that, if you wish. I need only deny having said it—and with a dozen witnesses to bear me out, or a hundred. But I will not have to deny what I have said, Count Otho, since I am in position to assure you that the Emperor will not receive you if I but say the word. So let us be sensible and deal promptly with facts."

Otho sank back in his chair. There was in Vekuss's voice and manner an assurance that was more eloquent than his boasts. And these boasts only confirmed what Otho had heard whispered in barracks and salons these years past, of

the sinister power of the Black Cabinet.

"Proceed with your inquisition in your own way, Colonel Vekuss," he yielded. "I will admit the things you say as to the Russian and Captain Kurz, though I do contend I had my justification."

"That is more sensible, Count Otho," said Vekuss agreeably. "Now that you admit the truth, it affords us a foundation to proceed at once with the Baron Thugutt's wishes. You have already learned of the heavy consequences of your actions, and now we will consider in what way you are to repair the damage. Happily a way presents itself, one that will carry you high into the Emperor's favor and lend lasting glory to the name of Donau-Walden!"

"It is this that I came to hear, Herr Colonel."

"But I warn you there is exacting sacrifice in the line of this duty, Count Otho; though I doubt if there is an officer in all the Hussars who would not thank his stars for such an opportunity."

"I have never held comfort too highly in the performance of duty, Herr Colonel," Otho rejoined frostily. "But why do you not tell me at once what is expected? Surely you have prepared my mind for most any adventure."

"Here, then, is the rich plum we are holding out to you, Count Otho. We must send a trusted emissary abroad on a most critical mission. With that devil Bonaparte in Egypt, with Paris ready to turn upon the base weaklings of the Directory who flounder about at the control of the government, with the French royalists concentrated back in France, with England ready to strike, we but wait for the hour of our emperor's destiny. The Duc d'Enghien or the Count of Provence will ascend the throne as Louis's heir and the house of Bourbon will have full sway, which will give us an alliance that will spread his Majesty's domains in many directions. Bavaria will be ours, as well as Lombardy, and Piedmont and the Netherlands."

Otho quickened at this picture; his eyes glowed.

"An intrigue of proportions, Herr Colonel Vekuss," he exclaimed. "But my training has been in arms, not in diplomacy. What possible service might I perform in France that a skilful diplomatist might not accomplish to better advantage?"

"Only a soldier, Lieutenant Count Otho," said Vekuss tensely, "possesses the courage that is required for this duty, the spirit that is needed for success, the willingness to accept the sacrifice that is entailed."

"You have not made your meaning clear to me, Herr Colonel."



VEKUSS walked to the door, opened it suddenly as if to make sure there was no eavesdropper, then returned to lean across the desk. A gesture, Otho thought, and waited tensely.

"His Majesty's representative must first sacrifice his identity, his name, his very existence. He must be listed with the dead, and mourned for the dead by his family and friends." Vekuss whispered this, slowly forcing his way nearer to Otho as he spoke. "In France he must pass himself as a Frenchman, he must gain the confidence of the Jacobins, the Constitutionals, the usurpers, so that he may learn the moment at which we are to strike. He must be—"

Otho leaped to his feet in a sudden passion and drew himself to his full height.

"A spy!" he cried. "You dare to ask a Count of Donau-Walden to act as an ordinary spy! Herr Colonel, this is an infamous insult of which the Emperor shall learn!"

Vekuss leaned back and sat without change of expression until Otho's tempest spent itself.

"I did not say spy, Lieutenant Count Otho. I said a secret emissary of his Imperial Majesty the Emperor." He paused. "But if you have so little love for his Majesty and so little hatred for those French barbarians who murdered the Emperor's aunt, if the name of Bonaparte stirs you with no wish for

vengeance, then I have been wasting my time. I will report, then, to the Baron Thugutt your decision."

Vekuss arose and bowed stiffly.

"I regret, Count Otho, the unpleasant duty that lies before me under the circumstances. But at least I can remember my obligation to his Majesty, and I can't forget that prompt restitution for the death of the Russian Perov will be certain to appease the Czar."

Otho's eyes fell away from Vekuss and he sat down slowly. He knew that Vekuss had not closed the incident, that his words of finality were but another ruse, a crack of the Imperial whip, a goad to force him into line. But he knew, too, that once Vekuss really closed the interview, he would make good those threats. He motioned Vekuss back into his seat, an indication of partial defeat, an indication that he had not finally rejected the grim offer.

"But you forget, Herr Colonel, that I am a man of both family and affairs. When you ask me to abandon my name, you ask me to abandon my wife, my servants, my house in Vienna and my estate in Tyrol as well as my prospects in Lombardy."

The cold dead eyes in Vekuss' head gleamed for a fleeting instant.

"You did not wait to hear all, Count Otho. It is not so terrible as all that. His Majesty will give orders that will protect your interests fully. More than that, you shall have a substantial token of his gratitude—fifty thousand florins a year while you are absent. If you are required to be away only a few months, as may be the case, you will nevertheless receive back your estate in Lombardy which you lost because of the rascal Bonaparte."

"The countess, Herr Colonel? On a matter of such importance, I must have time in which to consult with her upon our affairs."

"The countess must not know, Count Otho. But four shall know your secret: his Majesty, Baron Thugutt, I and yourself."

"Preposterous! Then what is to prevent the countess from—from remarriage if my absence should be extended and she thought me dead? You must see the impossibility of your plan, the bitter injustice of it, Herr Colonel!"

"Patience, Count Otho. You must learn the lesson that you have two ears and but one mouth, and then you will escape many hasty conclusions. Please to remember the power of our gracious Emperor. That power shall protect you and yours. The Emperor will order the countess to remain in mourning indefinitely; and she shall be held in mourning until your return, which removes her not only from the possibility of remarriage but—pardon the thought—from harmless flirtation."

"The probable length of this mission, Herr Colonel?"

Vekuss shrugged and poured another glass of wine.

"Until the Emperor's star of destiny has reached its zenith, Count Otho," he replied. "Then we shall send for you to claim the rich rewards that will be yours out of his Majesty's gratitude. Perhaps a few months, perhaps a year, or even longer. But we will leave you in France no minute longer than is necessary, of that you may be certain."

"Then how long may I have in which to prepare my decision, Herr Colonel?"

The colonel rose again and struck a gong twice. A servant entered with his hat.

"His Excellency, the Baron Thugutt, instructed me that I must act immediately, Count Otho. But on your account I will stretch my orders to the limits. In an hour I shall return here for your answer. You will be prepared at that time."

Otho rose with resolution. His mind had weighed the situation, reckoned all the possibilities, stripped itself of doubts and uncertainties. There remained only a few details to be cleared up.

"I will be permitted to give the countess no intimation of my pending return when I go to say farewell, Herr Colonel?"

"It will be impossible for you to say farewell to the countess, Count Otho. You must leave tonight, from this room, when you have received your detailed instructions and received the secret code."

Otho swayed slightly, but his eyes, straight and level, did not waver.

"If I go, may I ask that I take with me my servant Plobo? He is a fellow upon whose courage and discretion we may count fully."

"That is altogether impossible, Count Otho. You must go alone."

"The proposals you have made, they will be reduced to record, of course, under the seal of the Baron Thugutt?"

"Of course, if you so desire."

"Very well, Herr Colonel." Otho drew himself up and saluted. "Though you drive a hard bargain with me, I accept in the name of the Emperor's service. I am ready when you have given me my instructions. Please to have word sent to my man Plobo that I will not require his services here, and that he is to attend the countess at the château. My name—permit me to choose that for myself, Herr Colonel, since there is a name that has a peculiar significance to me—and which I shall carry as my own until I return again to Austria. Henceforward I am Monsieur le Falcon, a humble gentleman of France."

CHAPTER VI

HIS MAJESTY'S HUNGARIAN FERRET

THE passions that burned in Otho's mind through the first days of his long journey by horse and post-chaise to Paris sunk his eyes and singled out the bones of his cheeks and jaws. Fears, suspicions, uncertainties tormented him by day and haunted him through feverish nights. But an inherent stamina turned him back at the borderlands of madness. He forced himself into a discipline of more cheerful thoughts, closed his mind against those damning suspicions, assured himself over and over again that he

traveled to great adventures and brilliant opportunities in the Emperor's service.

By the time the French border passed behind him he had learned to close his eyes against that diamond on Zita's breast, against that note of warning from Fräulein Teschen. After all, the countess might have purchased the gem with some secret hoard of her own florins; and, as for the conduct of the fräulein, that might have been prompted by some jealous whim affecting Perov.

Over and over he reminded himself that the Emperor's trusted agents were not to be lightly discounted by mere suspicion. How absurd that such a man as Thugutt, or even Vekuss, should concern himself with intrigues affecting some minor personage of the court. Therefore, that being true, things could only be as they seemed. He must remember that the Emperor was Austria, that loyalty to the crown was the power that fired gentlemen of the empire to devoted service. Such were the ties, service and princely reward, that bound the Austrian state; the system that had given to Otho's fathers their ancient estates and proud titles; the bond that had forged a scepter for the Hapsburgs.

Major Moskolz, secret emissary in charge of the Emperor's French intrigues, received Otho in Paris with a grunted welcome and stared at him some moments in blunt appraisal. Moskolz was a gross person, heavy of paunch and with a puffy red face out of which two boring gray eyes suggested a sly agility of mind in matters of indirection. He was a sort of *pot-pourri* of nationalities—a dash of Italian, a strain of Russian, some little French, and otherwise Hungarian. He addressed Otho in French, the perfect French of a Parisian.

"Your experience, Citizen, in matters requiring great tact, discretion and patience?" he demanded in a superior way. "Your credentials state merely that you are a lieutenant of Hussars and that your orders will follow by a secret courier."

"I have spent my life mostly in Vienna

among gentlemen," Otho replied coolly. "I may say, also, that I have served as aide-de-camp on the staff of his Excellency Marshal Würmser, Herr Major Moskolz."

The major cast a sharp startled look at the door and snapped his fingers in rebuke.

"Do not again address me by that name while in Paris!" he said in an irate whisper. "Did not your papers tell you I am known here as Citizen Lanvisier? Please to remember your discretion hereafter, Lieutenant Count Otho!"

"My name, then, by that same rule, Citizen Lanvisier, is Monsieur le Falcon, as my papers show," Otho rejoined pointedly.

"Yes, yes." The major choked purple. "You must learn to hold a respectful tongue for your superiors. But, above all things, remember that the blade of the French guillotine is very greedy, Citizen."

"I will try to keep my head, monsieur," Otho replied. "But my duties here? I have traveled far and under many grave uncertainties. I wish to be occupied at once."

Moskolz cocked his head to one side and folded his fat hands over his paunch.

"Remember, Citizen Otho," he said, "that Paris is a powder keg. A careless spark from the steel of indiscretion and—poof! So, first of all, you must get yourself safely located, mix about among people until you know their ways and thoughts." He paused to consider, and added, "That, I would estimate, will require several months of time if you are quick of mind and eye."

"Preposterous!" cried Otho. "I am by no means a stranger to Paris. I was here once for a matter of six months to take instruction in riding, fencing and dancing at the Academy of the Nobles. As to conditions since the Revolution, I have kept in touch through the French émigrés who cooled their heels in Vienna. Therefore, with a statement from you of my duties, I can proceed immediately."

The major sat bolt upright and registered quick alarm.

"Peste! You mention French émigrés!

Then how are you to know that some turncoat will not recognize you and bring that sleek ferret Fouché of the police upon our trail?"

"My associates were gentlemen of title, monsieur; gentlemen whose fortunes had been ruined by the mad rabbles. Are they not our friends in any enterprise that is to restore the house of Bourbon?"

"Yes, yes, Citizen." Moskolz gasped relief. "Yet have I not forgotten that the rascally Lafayette turned the Queen of France, our late Emperor's own sister, over to the tender mercies of that rabble. Nor that the Count de Orthis joined the mob in voting for the murder of his king."

"It is my argument, monsieur," Otho replied stiffly, "that the Marquis de Lafayette merely did his duty as an officer of the National Guard. As for the count, he was a cowardly turncoat trying to save his own worthless neck, so that it is fortunate he failed. As I have said, my friends were émigrés, and therefore gentlemen of unquestioned loyalty to the throne."

"Please always to remember," the major rejoined, "that your own neck is your own problem, and less valuable than the cause of Austria. So if your wits do not protect you from the French secret police, see to it that you do not look to me for help."

"You need have no fear on that score," said Otho with a frosty smile. "Perhaps the major has noted that I speak the French of a Frenchman. Why not? My mother was French, and also there was a strain of French on the side of my father, who was of the Tyrol. I am, in fact, as little Austrian as you, monsieur; and at the same time as much an Austrian when it comes to serving his Imperial Majesty. Thanks to the private theatricals of the court at Vienna, I am very expert in the art of disguise and have come prepared to change my appearance as often as may be necessary to avoid the French police. Therefore I am ready to enter upon my duties without delay, monsieur."

Moskolz shook his head decisively.

"You forget that I am told your orders come later from Vienna by courier," he said in the voice of command. "So, you will stand by and wait. Under no circumstances will you communicate with Vienna except through me."

The Hungarian paused, took from his finger a heavy gold ring of garnet setting. He removed the stone, reversed it and pressed its under surface to a sheet of paper. There resulted a faint scroll of fine lines in the shape of a boar's head.

"That is my mark, Herr Lieutenant," he said. "In event I should send for you, the seal will authenticate my summons. Now you will go, since I have other business."



PARIS, Otho found in a week of idle gaping, was little of the glamorous Paris he had known years before as a boy. The upheavals of the rabbles had wrought sad alterations. Even the names of important streets had been changed to conform to the temper of the Revolution; and he found thoroughfares bearing such names as the Rue des Droits de l'Homme, Rue de la Revolution and Rue de la Loi. Even Montmartre went by the name of Mont Marat. The Salle du Ménagement, ancient playground of nobles and gentlemen of fortune, was now converted to a hall for the rabble in which laws and government were debated publicly by upstart statesmen.

A visit to the Salle du Ménagement filled Otho with impotent rage at sight of the flaunted battle flags taken from proud Austrian regiments by the audacious robber, Napoleon Bonaparte. Other evidences of Austria's late humiliation were everywhere in the public places; captured cannon, lances, stands of rifles cast aside by the retreating Austrian grenadiers; and in the Tuileries was exhibited shamelessly the priceless loot of Italian art treasures that had won Bonaparte the name in Italy of *il grand ladrone*.

In cafés and theaters there was endless chatter of the fellow Bonaparte. Otho often found himself boiling inwardly at

the wanton boasts and babble. Bonaparte, ravisher of Lombardy, sung publicly as a hero; his red excesses in Egypt hailed great victories for France; a clamor for his return, again to wipe the Austrian armies out of Italy and humble the crowns of all Europe. The license of the rabble flooded him with mingled dismay and rage.

There was no restraint upon their tongues as they shouted maledictions upon the crowns of all Europe. France will bring all tyrants to their knees, they boasted. An end to Black Cabinets. The people hold the power in their own hands and shall have something to say to all tyrants! Look at America—so France shall be. Down with England and Austria with their slimy nobility! There was no limit to such brash extravagances.

But a quickening interest shortly replaced mere inner resentment as Otho listened to these vaporings. He saw in them a vital symptom of the unrest that lay close under the surface in France. Everywhere, coupled with the praise of Bonaparte, was the taunt that Sièyès and his quartet of puppets of the French Directory were weaklings who must be turned on their backs. France was drifting into chaos. Her enemies were overrunning her frontiers, lawlessness was gnawing at her vitals; her treasury was empty, graft and inefficiency rampant.

Vive Bonaparte! Groups of adventurers in the public drinking places drained their glasses to that cry, the toast of irresponsible Paris. Otho smiled grimly to himself each time he heard this cry of a people maddened by their own reckless excesses. Well might they count upon the martial genius of that ogre, except for one thing that they did not know. They were undermining their own government, little knowing that Bonaparte would not return. The English fleets held him securely bottled up. Not even a single frigate, or a sail, could slip through the cordon of English sloops and Allied spies. Thus the French would undermine the Directory, the government of the rabble would fall and the Count of Provence

would take up the fallen scepter of Louis XVI. Bonaparte would then be dealt with as he deserved. The Emperor of Austria would attend to that promptly enough.

Such observations warmed Otho's blood, flooded him with new hopes through his first week in Paris. His stay in Paris might be only a matter of weeks, or of months at most, he told himself. Nightly he sipped champagne at a little café on the Rue de Rivoli, where adventurers gathered to drink and boast. Often officers of the new French army would sit at the tables, their tongues wagging noisily as the evening grew. Even when they got their heads together in raucous whispers, Otho was able to hear what they said, and to laugh to himself. For upon Bonaparte they were staking their all, the future of the Republic of France.

But as the days multiplied without word from Moskolz, Otho's morale slowly sank again. He found it increasingly difficult, by the end of a fortnight, to shut his mind against those tormenting doubts and suspicions. Zita's diamond, the dying words of Captain Kurz, those notes from Fräulein Teschen rose up unbidden.

His patience was near an end. He was sitting through an evening at the café on the Rue de Rivoli, stewing bitterly at the inaction of Moskolz, oblivious now of the chattering groups about him, when his ear caught the vibrant whispering of a young dragoon lieutenant.

"The news has been sent to Bonaparte," he confided. "I tell you, comrades, I know whereof I speak. The Directory has been deceiving him about conditions, but trusted officers have sent through an English spy, who carries many English newspapers that tell the truth of conditions in Italy and France. Our general will not fail us. He will break through!"

At a sharp admonition from another officer, the young dragoon lowered his voice. Otho sat abstractly drinking lest he attract attention. He had no need to hear more. That revelation crystallized

a decision in his mind. On leaving the café, he went directly to the billet of Moskolz on the Rue St. Jacques.

Instead of flying into a military rage at the defiance of his orders, as Otho expected, the Hungarian came out of his sleep in an urbane humor. He turned up his light, waved Otho to a chair, and offered him a glass of wine.

"Your orders, Lieutenant Count Otho, have arrived this very day," said Moskolz. "Vienna has chosen you for a very important duty, indeed. Please to join me in a toast to your very great success."

Otho declined the glass. He guessed that the Hungarian's changed humor was due to learning the new agent's position at court, but he had no desire to place himself on a friendly basis with the fellow.

"I came with very important information, Monsieur Lanvisier," he replied brusquely. "Paris is burning with the fever of revolt against the Directory, and is looking to this fellow Bonaparte to return from Egypt."

The Hungarian laughed heartily.

"For many weeks I have known that, my dear Lieutenant," he replied with indifference. "Also have I known how utterly impossible it is for that sly Corsican to escape from Egypt. The English are stopping even the smallest sails in the Mediterranean, and the eyes of our agents never leave Bonaparte for a single instant." He lowered his voice. "One of his own immediate staff is of our service and knows his very move and thought."

"Nevertheless," Otho rejoined, taken aback at this reception, "it is not to be taken too lightly when the French officers boast that he will get through."

"Ah, but the French are a nation of boasters, and Bonaparte, being too long in the service of France, is the greatest boaster of all!" Moskolz laughed. "But let me commend you, Lieutenant Count Otho. For better than a fortnight you have been in Paris without coming afoul of the French secret police."

"That is simple enough, Monsieur Lanvisier," Otho said dryly. "But is it

not wise that I follow this rumor of the fellow Bonaparte?"

Moskolz shrugged his appraisal of the fear.

"By the time the Corsican could reach Paris, even if he avoided our agents by some miracle, it would be a most unhealthy place for him, Lieutenant, since the Count of Provence will be confirmed on the throne as Louis XVIII within three months."

Otho, his eyes gleaming at this assertion, impulsively lifted the glass he had rejected a moment before.

"To his Majesty, the King of France!" he proposed.

"*Vive le Roi!*" rejoined Moskolz. "It will be a glorious day for Austria."

As the Hungarian laid his glass aside he crossed the room and took from a port-manteau a small sealed envelop. He handed it to Otho with a slight bow.

"It is from Vienna, and for you," he announced. "But since it is in the code, you must not stop to read it here. Also, I have my own orders for your disposition, as I have suggested. That, my dear Lieutenant, is a subject which we will discuss here tomorrow."

"As you please, Monsieur Lanvisier," said Otho, rising reluctantly, and placing the document from Vienna in his pocket. "I will report here promptly at ten in the morning; if that hour please you."

"Ten o'clock," said Moskolz in a soft, oily voice. "I trust you are comfortable at the hotel to which I dispatched you, Lieutenant Count Otho?"

"As comfortable, Monsieur Lanvisier, as any one can hope to be outside of Vienna."

CHAPTER VII

AN ORDER IN CIPHER

ON LEAVING the Hungarian's room, Otho paused in the hall to change his appearance. It was his thought that should Fouché's suspicious agents trail him to Moskolz' billet, he would leave them waiting idly behind. He had found it a simple

matter to avoid French eyes, thus far. In going about Paris he had dressed in the severely plain clothes of the hour, though his long coats changed both color and lines on being turned inside out. A few deft touches of a Viennese pigment, a bit of tinted wax, a shift of coat and posture—and he was another man. Not once in his month in Paris had he been stopped by the prying French gendarmes; a test in itself since sharp eyes and ready ears were everywhere.

The letter in his pocket quickened his steps across Paris to the little hotel on the Rue des Quatre Fils to which Moskolz had sent him. His pulse quickened at the thought that there might be something more than a terse official word. Perhaps there was news of Zita, a mention of Plobo, a line on how things went in the Tyrol and in Italy. It might even bring news of the Emperor's restoration of Otho's rescued estates, since Austria was now master of Piedmont and Lombardy.

At the door of his billet, on the second floor of the hotel, he paused. An unaccountable premonition, a sensing of danger struck him. He paused in the half-darkened corridor, smiled at his own trepidation, then knocked at his door. Often before he had done this. As was his habit in moments of extreme caution he waited a moment and rapped a second time. He was on the point of applying his latchkey, when the door opened in his face.

Otho recoiled at sight of a gendarme in uniform. The next moment a taper was applied to a candle lamp and two other gendarmes appeared.

"Enter, Citizen!" commanded the French officer, appraising Otho with searching eye. "You are looking for Citizen Le Falcon?"

"Citizen Le Falcon?" Otho repeated with well feigned surprise. Often he had rehearsed in his mind such a scene as this. "I have called, citizens, upon my good friend Mademoiselle Franchet who occupied these rooms when last I was in Paris from my station in Lyons."

The gendarmes turned to a tall, cadaverous, red bearded man in civilian clothes who stepped forward and snapped out an order.

"Close the door," he commanded. Then, "Find what the papers on his person have to say!"

Otho, cool and self-contained in this sudden crisis, held up his hand in protest. He knew that a search would be fatal. They would find the Austrian cipher, which they would promptly identify, and the two Belgian pistols secreted in his waistband, the case, bullet mold and spare flints for which were secreted in his billet. He launched a desperate ruse.

"Guard yourselves, gentlemen," he warned them. "I am the aide-de-camp of General Moreau, in Paris from our frontier on an official errand, and I have no taste for insult at the hands of my friends the police."

The red bearded man blinked rapidly at this announcement, caught by the cool, certain voice in which it was delivered.

"You have your orders, Citizen Lieutenant?" he demanded.

"But yes, you may be certain of that," replied Otho. He laughed lightly. "I will leave you to guess why I come here without my uniform to call upon the mademoiselle. My uniform is at the home of a good friend, but there are many who can identify me readily."

"Pardon, one moment, Citizen," said the leader. He left the room and returned in a few moments. Otho guessed his mission. "The mademoiselle left the hotel more than a month ago," the fellow reported. "Since then this suite has been occupied by the man Le Falcon, whom we wish to interview on a matter of suspicion."

"Suspicion of what?" Otho prompted. "It is no affair of mine, of course, but since you have accosted me in this strange manner, I am curious."

"An anonymous note to the prefect of police, Citizen, that he is a Royalist spy, in the service of the Austrian army."

"A case upon which no precaution

should be lost," affirmed Otho. "We are having trouble enough with these Austrians, are we not? But please to come with me at once to the Café of the Golden Cock on the Rue de Rivoli, where a score of my fellow officers will identify me. It is only discreet that you take that precaution, Citizen, though you must understand my objection as an officer of the republican army to being searched like an ordinary felon."

"I will go with you myself," the red bearded man spoke up promptly. "I am the only one here who is not in the uniform of a gendarme. You will pardon my precaution, Citizen Lieutenant, but I will have a thousand apologies to offer you."

"Ah, but those rascals who are my comrades—" Otho laughed—"will gorge themselves with champagne at my expense. I am at your service, Citizen."



THEY left at once, Otho's escort all but convinced. As they passed down the narrow thoroughfare toward the Café of the Golden Cock, Otho plied his custodian with questions.

"And the general-in-chief, Bonaparte?" he ventured. "You have heard the report that he will soon be back from Egypt?"

"It is to be hoped so, Citizen," the Frenchman replied. "You hear it on every hand that he is the hope of France in this hour. But for my own part, I fear he can never hope to escape the English fleet, Citizen."

"A difficulty, indeed," assented Otho. "And this Austrian you are looking for, you have his description?"

"Perfectly, my Lieutenant. A small, wiry young man with very blue eyes, dark hair which he wears to his neck, the skin of a woman on his cheeks, and a thin, rather beakish nose."

"You are assured, then, that you would know him once you came upon his tracks?"

"Without a doubt. Moreover, the Austrian agents are all as stupid as oxen, Citizen."

"As stupid, would you say, as the French secret police of Paris, Citizen?"

The Frenchman stopped in his tracks. Otho had timed his conversation to bring them to a darkened point in the street. His pistol was thrust close against the other's stomach. He forced his captive in the dark shadows between two buildings and bound and gagged him with the agent's manacles, belt and handkerchief.

"Your wits need to be much sharper, monsieur, the next time you meet Monsieur Le Falcon," Otho twitted his victim. "I wish also to correct an error in your description of the gentleman. His nose, while thin and well formed, is by no means beakish. *Bon soir, monsieur!*"

Upon leaving the helpless police agent, Otho hurried on through several streets and paused to change his appearance by thinning out the thickness and curve of his eyebrows, staining a large scar under one eye, altering the dress of his hair, and turning his hat and coat. Now that the crisis was safely past, he found his hand stricken by a light ague, his legs weak under him. The unexpected swiftness with which the French police had struck, the hint of a traitor to the Austrian crown, unstrung him far more than the mere physical danger to which he had been subjected.

He hailed a cabriolet and drove across the Seine, dismissed the vehicle and walked back by a devious route to the Tuileries, where he found a second conveyance in which he rode to the Bois de Boulogne. Caution told him that the French police would canvass every hotel in Paris, once the red bearded man had been found, and therefore he must wait before engaging new lodgings. He found a place in a hedge where he lay down to wait until morning. At daylight, as soon as he saw people stirring about, he returned to the heart of the city. At a small café he stopped for breakfast, then got a cabriolet in which he drove back and forth past the billet of Major Moskolz. Finding the way clear he left the

cabriolet and doubled back. An elderly woman answered the knocker.

"Citizen Lanvisier?" She repeated the inquiry with a wry face. "But Citizen Lanvisier left my lodgings with scant notice last night, paying me only for the days he was here."

"His new address, Citoyenne? What word did he leave with you for close friends who might call?"

The woman shrugged disdainfully.

"Nothing did he say, Citizen," she replied. "Nothing except that he would not pay me extra upon leaving so suddenly. I do not know where he went nor do I care."

Otho stood looking blankly at the door which the woman had slammed in his face. Moskolz gone, with no word of his new location. Did it mean that Moskolz had been warned of the French police? Had he, too, been driven suddenly to cover by Fouché's agents? Otho turned abruptly away from the billet and hurried up the street. Here he engaged a cabriolet and drove across Paris, intent on leaving for the village of Neuilly, a short distance away. His mind was centered back upon the letter in cipher from Vienna. He must read that at once, and then lay his plans for the future.

On leaving the cabriolet to walk the last few kilometers, Otho was brought face to face with a new dilemma. The fare cleaned out most of what remained of his meager store of francs. In his rooms on the Rue des Quatre Fils he had left his store of several thousand louis. There, also, he had left his immediate personal necessities: his razor, rings, his extra watch, steels and flints, his sword and the case and parts for his pistols, and his clothing.

As he walked on, he made an anxious inventory of his effects. Less than ten francs remained in cash; a watch, two small dueling pistols inlaid in silver, a sapphire ring, gold pocket pencil set with a ruby, and a silver penknife. He also had a small quantity of pigment for use in disguise.

Impatience to get at the message from

Vienna did not overcome prudence as he entered Neuilly. He added a mustache to his appearance, a black patch over one eye and assumed a halting, slovenly gait as he engaged a room at the small town inn. Instead of disappearing immediately into his room, he went ostentatiously about the village, ate at a ramshackle café, and having thus avoided any appearance of stealth or secrecy, went to his room.

Once inside, with the door securely locked, Otho brought out the letter and tore it open avidly. He saw that it was in the Austrian cipher that Colonel Vekuss had given him.

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □
 V F E L E O U V C E J T U U C L
 E J E C > < C J C L
 U L L E O F U L J

Under this, on the message itself, he wrote down the key, slowly, out of his memory:

Q	R	S		
N	T	U		
P	V	O		
			Z	X
				W

D	A	E		
F	H	I		
G	C	B		
			M	K
			L	J

Each symbol of the message from Vienna referred him to the letter in the corresponding angle of the key. Thus the first symbol, a square, took him to the letter encased in a square in the key underneath, or H. The second symbol represented I and the third S. He needed only to refer to the appropriate angle in the key in order to reduce them, a letter at a time, to English, which had been adopted by the Black Cabinet as the medium of cipher communication, since it would further confound the French

police. The symbols that carried dots represented letters in the last half of the alphabet as contained in the dotted angles of the key arrangement. Thus a square enclosing a dot represented the letter T. In a few minutes he had reduced the cipher.

His Majesty commands you stay in Paris until king is restored.

Otho sat gaping at the message. Slowly but surely he accepted the fact that there could be no evasion of that command. Not only was it signed with a small encircled seal in purple, the cryptic seal of Colonel Vekuss, but it was done on the official paper of the court. He knew very well that implicit obedience was exacted of such orders. There was the cat-o'-nine-tails or a firing squad for refractory grenadiers who appeared late at military formation. There was dismissal, disgrace, imprisonment, for the officer who forgot the letter of Imperial orders.

CHAPTER VIII

THE THÉÂTRE FRANÇAISE

WHEN he had accepted the inevitable, Otho arose with a short laugh and strode from the inn. It struck him as incongruous that Vekuss should send an order in cipher done under the Imperial crest. But he imposed a soldier's discipline upon his own thoughts, and veered away from the subject of Vienna with its train of damning phantoms to his plans for the future. There was but one thing to do: reestablish contact with Moskolz as quickly as possible. He convinced himself that he would be able to find Moskolz along the boulevard, in the Salle du Ménage, at the Tuileries, or in some haunt of Frenchmen where the Emperor's secret agents would be at work.

By pawning his ring, he was able to stay at the inn a week while his trail cooled in Paris. The best price he could exact for the sapphire was twenty francs, though he had paid a thousand

florins for it at Milan. Before going back to Paris he sold his watch for ten francs. His pistols brought no offer though inlaid in silver, the work of a famous Brussels gunsmith, and worth their weight in gold. The villagers smiled at the weapons. Their caliber was absurdly small—.17—they argued. Fit for nothing better than a petty duel, whereas a Frenchman must have a Charleville of .75 caliber, or at least a weapon carrying a slug large enough to stop a prowler. Hence, on paying his account at the inn, Otho was left with a reserve of sixteen francs to see him to the end of Moskolz's trail.

Three days in Paris brought him to his last franc. This he gave to the barber who trimmed his hair and shaved him. From sunup until midnight each day he plied the haunts of important Frenchmen, but with no hint of Moskolz. Luckily the landlady at whose humble place he had taken lodgings exacted rent for a week in advance, so that he had shelter from the chill nights of late September.

On the fourth morning, the seriousness of his predicament was brought home to him in no uncertain way by the aching void of his stomach. Hunger was a new experience to Otho. Even at marches and maneuvers he had never faced real hunger before. It drove him from shop to shop until he succeeded in selling one of his precious pistols for five francs. The pencil brought another five francs from a Parisian Shylock, though well worth ten times that sum for its ruby setting.

This stop-gap of ten francs merely brought him, two days later, back into extremity. Now at the end of his resources, since he vowed he would starve rather than part with his remaining pistol, Otho set out resolutely to comb Paris for Moskolz. The exertion brought nothing better than a sharp edge to his hunger. He tossed through a miserable night surveying his desperate situation. Return to Vienna was now doubly impossible. A further search for Moskolz on an empty stomach likewise was out of the question. In a day or two the stubble on his face

would assume proportions and the gendarmes would begin to look at him askance. Also, that stubble, until it assumed the proportions of a beard, would make his disguises ineffectual.

His mind turned to thoughts of entering the French army. Recruiting posters were everywhere. Officers were needed for the new republican forces. But he dismissed this plan with a groan. It would be sure to mean his assignment to the frontier or into Italy. And the Emperor's command was that he remain in Paris. Otho, in his extremity, finally centered his hopes upon a little gilt sign that he had noted many times over the door of a shabby residence on the Rue Chambron. He smiled grimly at the thought. A count of Donau-Walden hiring himself to an ordinary French fencing master was mildly amusing even in his present misery. Something to laugh about anon in Vienna, he told himself. Even the Emperor would get vast amusement from such a tale.

He went early the next morning to the fencing master and offered his services. M. Montreville, the proprietor, was an effervescent little Frenchman, conceited and decisive.

"My patrons," he announced breezily, "come for the instruction by the great Montreville. But since I have so many who wish to know the new art, if monsieur is the artist, I will consider his employment."

"If you have foils, I will be glad to match my skill against yours so that you can judge for yourself," Otho replied.

"Rapiers?" Montreville's nose lifted. "No longer are the rapiers used among gentlemen of France, monsieur. Are you an émigré, or perhaps from the provinces? It is the cut and thrust sword that is the rage of today."

"I am willing that you judge my skill with the sword, monsieur," Otho replied.

Though weak from hunger, Otho roused enough vitality to put himself through a series of fast sorties. Montreville, he found, was mediocre with the small French cut and thrust sword. He

even compared him with the unfortunate Perov in his failure to conceal his intentions at each thrust or cut.

"Excellent!" exclaimed the fencing master, bringing the exchange to an end. "My patrons, they will be delighted with monsieur's work. You are engaged at once, monsieur, at the pay of three francs for each day."

"Surely monsieur speaks in jest," said Otho. "While I dislike to mention such details, I am without funds to pay my living costs, which is the reason I offer my service."

"But three francs, monsieur, is that not sufficient for any reasonable man?" protested M. Montreville. "Men who labor hard in the fields receive a single franc, skilled artisans rarely more than two or three. Yet for a few hours of pleasant effort I offer you the three francs. If you do not appreciate my generosity, I will bid you adieu, monsieur."

Otho made a swift calculation. Three francs a day was a tragic pittance. He paid the humblest servant on his estate as much as that. Plobo, his man of all work, averaged an equivalent of ten francs, in addition to a place to live. But three francs were better than nothing he concluded. It, at least, would reduce the pangs of hunger and give him strength to continue his search for Moskolz.

"I accept," he said presently. "I am ready to begin my work immediately."



LUCKILY, M. Montreville's patrons were clumsy amateurs with the sword and Otho was able to put them through their paces with little exertion. Somehow he managed to hold up through the day. On receiving his dole of three francs late in the afternoon he made his way to the nearest café, spent two francs for food and *vin ordinaire* and his remaining franc at the barber's. The next day, consequently, found him again oppressed by hunger. Profiting by experience, he spent only a single franc for dinner, half a franc at the barber's and thus put by a surplus for breakfast or emergency.

Nightly, Otho pressed his search for Moskolz. He even ventured a visit to the Hungarian's former lodgings in the hope that Moskolz might have sent back word of his whereabouts. But the landlady had no word. A week of this existence and Otho's spirit was at its lowest ebb. While he had managed to save from his pittance enough to pay for a second week's lodging, he did this at the expense of his stomach. The barber, landlady and laundress could not be put aside, even though he reduced himself to one meal a day in order to pay them.

But destiny, nevertheless, lay in wait for Otho at M. Montreville's. His rescue from the fencing master's dubious hospitality came, not from finding the elusive Moskolz, but from a patron of the rapier, M. Londeau, a timid, underdeveloped little Frenchman without previous instruction in swordsmanship and with a physique unequal to the exertion. M. Londeau paused every few minutes for breath, but insisted upon two lessons daily.

"You prepare for an affair of honor, Citizen Londeau?" Otho inquired at the end of the fifth lesson.

Londeau laughed nervously.

"But no, citizen," he panted. "It is the demand of my impresario, who has cast me in two rôles at the Théâtre Française, one of them requiring play with the rapier."

"I am much relieved to learn that is the case," Otho rejoined lightly. "In an affair of honor I fear you would cut a sorry figure, except on the stage. You are an actor, then, by profession?"

"I had supposed you recognized me," replied Londeau with mildly injured dignity. "Have you not, by chance, heard of Citizen Londeau who is able to represent two men, and sometimes three, in one and the same play?"

"You interest me very much," Otho exclaimed. "You see, I have amused myself often in private theatricals, and in the very same way, by taking the part of as many as half a dozen characters."

Monsieur Londeau looked sharply at Otho, then lifted his eyebrows.

"Indeed?" he commented dubiously.

Following his next lesson, M. Londeau declared that he had learned such swordsmanship as he required for his act, settled his account with M. Montreville, tendered Otho a tip of five francs which Otho declined with a stiff bow, and left. Otho, growing daily more lean and disconsolate, had all but forgotten the actor when he appeared a few days later.

"You spoke seriously, Citizen," he addressed Otho, "when you told me of having taken many parts at private theatricals?"

"As many as half a dozen parts, Citizen Londeau," said Otho, "though for my own amusement and that of my friends. I claim no ability as an actor."

"But if you can do that well, and your services are not engaged, there is an excellent opportunity at the Théâtre Française, citizen. My impresario, let me explain, asked me to prepare an act, but since I have no taste for burlesque, I recalled your remarks. If you are serious, I will intercede for you that you may have a trial."

Otho's interest quickened. He noted that M. Londeau's waistcoat and shirt were of silk, his coat and breeches of broadcloth. Besides, he was receptive to any opportunity that might rescue him from his present dilemma. But he suppressed any show of eagerness.

"What is it that would be required, Citizen Londeau?"

"The appearance in a specialty, Citizen, which burlesques characters who are not wholly in the public favor. First, you must appear as the shade of the detested Robespierre, then on making a swift change on the stage, as Citizen Sièyès. A third change will show a royalist who boasts of an intrigue with the Directory to restore the Count of Provence to the throne. A final change is to depict the Austrian, Baron Thugutt, who approves everything that is being done in France. The rôles present many difficulties of makeup, to be sure, and if it is impossible—"

"It sounds very simple," Otho broke in.

His mind weighed the situation swiftly. The audacity of it brought a sparkle to his eyes; an agent of Austria mimicking his own premier on the stage of France, making a burlesque of his own cause. The jest, though, would be upon the French, he argued, since they would be giving him safe harbor while he plied his secret work for the emperor. "If I succeed, what payment might I expect, Citizen?" he inquired.

"That is a matter for the impresario, Monsieur Duvane, to arrange," Londeau replied, "though I should estimate an offer of ten francs for each performance."

"Then consider me at your disposal immediately, Citizen Londeau."

CHAPTER IX

THE CORSICAN

OTHO not merely passed muster, he aroused the impresario's enthusiasm by his character portrayals. Two weeks of rehearsal and instruction, and he made his public appearance to an immediate success. He effected his changes of makeup on the stage in view of the audience, an innovation that heightened the popularity of his act; and by the end of his first week on the stage, Otho was receiving fifteen francs for each performance, living in better quarters, eating regularly, and having real wine with his dinners in place of that red vinegar of bygone adventures.

In the third week of his appearance, Otho took it upon himself to add a fifth character to his act. Of this plan he discreetly said nothing to Duvane or Londeau. On appearing for his final encore, following Thugutt, he turned his back to the audience, effected a swift change, thrust his hand into his coat at the breast and strutted across the stage glowering at the audience. The response was an uproar of laughter and applause.

"A miracle!" exulted Duvane, when Otho joined him offstage. "It is the great tribute to your success, monsieur. If you had but asked my permission in advance

—but, *ventrebleu*, I should not have given it, since General Bonaparte is the most popular name in all France today!"

But before the next evening's performance, M. Duvane had cooled. He was fearful lest Bonaparte's influential military friends find offense. In that event there would be the sorry mischief to pay. Otho merely laughed at this warning. He even added to the satire, puffing his chest like a pigeon as he strutted the stage. The applause and laughter that followed set at rest even the director's uneasiness. Even the officers in the audience had laughed and stamped at Otho's caricature of the vain little Corsican. Thereafter, the satire of Napoleon Bonaparte became a regular part of Otho's act, and the most stinging.

One evening, as Otho was preparing to go on, M. Duvane hurried up with a warning. With him was M. Londeau, eyes staring and face pale with fear.

"I am not mistaken, Citizen," Londeau chattered, *sotto voce*. "Well do I know the face. It is the Madame Bonaparte herself who is in the audience tonight, with her paramour, the Citizen Charles."

Otho laughed at their alarm and inquired with a mischievous twinkle where the pair was seated in the audience.

"I shall favor them with the general's most frigid look." He smiled. "Perhaps, in addition to their amusement, it will teach them to be more discreet."

The impresario remonstrated in vain. Napoleon's double stalked the stage longer and more ridiculously than ever for madame's special benefit. It was not until after the performance that M. Duvane's apprehension was changed to astonishment. Otho received, from a valet at the stage door, a bouquet of violets to which was attached a brief unsigned note in feminine handwriting.

Excellent, monsieur! Except for a slight shade of difference in the coloring of your eyes, I might have mistaken you for the great little man himself.

Otho did not relax his search for Moskolz. All of his spare time went into the

search for his Emperor's secret agent. Though he derived a certain amusement and satisfaction from his success at the *Théâtre Française*, Otho viewed all that in the light of an adventure, a fortunate incident in his misfortunes in Paris, a something to be laughed over one day among friends at the *château of Donau-Walden* at Vienna. Until he could find Moskolz, he was but wasting his time in Paris.

With the advance of Fall, conditions of unrest in Paris multiplied. Violence and lawlessness now all but overran the police. Political agitation grew despite the best efforts of secret agents of the Directory. Royalists were plotting more boldly for the restoration of the crown. Jacobins were scheming to overthrow the existing government and get France into their own mad control. On every hand was the charge that the Directory was impotent, helpless; that the republic was a failure and France drifting to chaos.

Occasionally Otho heard the rumor that Bonaparte would arrive to save the situation. But that old rumor aroused less enthusiasm now. Even the officers of the garrison no longer drank toasts to the general's return. And from his own burlesque of the Corsican, Otho guessed at the upstart's waning popularity. He pictured the consequences of his own act, had he dared caricature Thugutt in Vienna. No matter that every one despised the son of a fisherman who was premier, they did not dare voice their thoughts. But there was government in Vienna, in France only the milling rabble trying vainly to rule itself. America had learned the folly of a government without a king. The ragged upstarts of the American Revolution had seen the terrible mistake and were even now beseeching the King of England to give them amnesty and restore the protectorate. Otho had heard this at the court of Vienna before coming to France. And France would be certain to follow.

In this crisis, when the Count of Provence was standing by ready to descend on Paris with army and suite to save

the city, Otho was goaded to a frenzy of impatience by his helplessness. Now was his hour for action, now the time when he might be of service, might win the lasting gratitude of his Emperor. If only he could find Moskolz. A plan struck him of a hurried trip to Vienna. There he would report to Vekuss the state of affairs, solicit fresh instruction and be back in Paris within the month. Though he convinced himself that circumstances justified the move, he finally abandoned it. It would be a violation of his Majesty's command; and also there was the risk that the new Louis—Louis XVIII—might come to the throne while Otho was absent from his appointed post of duty.

Into the situation came a stark rumor. It took Paris by the heels. Otho heard it in the excited chatter at breakfast. He seized a newspaper which had printed the rumor. The press gave the rumor credence. Bonaparte had escaped the vigil of the British fleets. He had landed at Frejus. A courier was coming ahead of him with the official news of his arrival. Already the messenger was reported at Lyons.



OTHO sneered quietly to himself. But the sneer did not put down the restless fear that came with the rumor. There was a tension in the air as he went about the streets, an excitement among the crowds of Frenchmen. The effect of the rumor puzzled him. Yesterday Napoleon's name aroused no interest; so Otho had thought the Corsican forgotten in Egypt. Now the name was on every mouth, the effect of it electrical. Bonaparte has returned from Egypt! People shouted the word at one another across the boulevards. A name had stirred up a sensation, a rumor had shaken a people out of a sullen apathy toward the republic.

"Vive la république! Vive Bonaparte!"

The toast reappeared in the cafés. Champagne popped on every table in the better restaurants. People drank to the general in *vin ordinaire* or beer in the cheaper places, calling him Buonaparte

and hailing him as the hope of France. At the theater that night, Otho was rather coolly received. The following night he was greeted by mingled applause and hisses. Bonaparte's arrival no longer was a mere rumor. The newspapers of Paris proclaimed it as truth. Josephine had left for Lyons to meet her husband. Paris was preparing a gala welcome. Then word came that the general wished to repair quietly to his home for a rest, after which he would give his attention to those Austrians on the Franco-Swiss frontier and in Italy.

The whole complexion of things changed with Bonaparte's arrival in Paris. Bonaparte would save the republic. His genius would drive off the English and Austrians who clung like wolves at the French throat. He would perform the miracle of restoring order in Paris. Jacobins and royalists would meet their master now. Such prattle replaced the mutterings of discontent, of hopeless dissatisfaction that had filled Otho's ears a few days before. Rumors now were of plots for Bonaparte to seize the government. He and his generals were planning a *coup d'état*. The Directory itself was in on the scheme, people whispered.

Police and political agents tried to put these rumors at rest. While some newspapers exposed them in reckless fashion, others quoted Bonaparte's plans, as coming from himself. He had no thought other than a short rest in Paris, then back to his military duties. He met the charge that he had wantonly abandoned his army in Egypt with the plea that he had come at the summons of duty, to regain from the Austrians what they had taken.

Otho waited for the wind to change. He convinced himself that it was only a passing whim, this wanton madness over the Corsican; a passion that would cool in a few days. Or perhaps Bonaparte himself would see that France was at the end of the trail, that only by restoring the crown would France be saved. What an opportunity, if he struck at once, for

the Corsican to win the undying gratitude of the Count of Provence, Louis XVIII. He would make certain, thus, of his own position as general-in-chief of the armies; perhaps be vested with a noble title.

At the Théâtre Française, the impresario and M. Londeau suffered nightly chills and fevers at Otho's burlesque of the popular hero. Their insistence that he delete Bonaparte from his act lost weight from the fact that the caricature continued to be well received. Nightly there were hisses and groans, even sharp shouts of anger; but there was also lively applause. M. Duvane argued hotly that the applause came only from royalist sympathizers and a few Jacobins; that the police were present at every performance observing closely the effect upon the public; that sooner or later Bonaparte would hear of the outrage and appeal, in offended vanity, for the suppression of the theater by Monsieur Fouché.

Against these pleas Otho turned a deaf ear. In his own mind he held to the hope that the whim of popular fancy would turn against the Corsican, fanned by the whispering that was to be heard discreetly among cafés, that Bonaparte had abandoned his soldiers to their own fate in Egypt. His little caricature of Bonaparte, he held, was a test of the Corsican's popularity, an index of shifting popular opinion, since men and women of all castes came nightly to the performances.

Besides, what revenge would Bonaparte dare take, no matter what his private feelings? Time enough to mend his act, Otho argued to the others, once Fouché actually objected or his minions found fault. And, after all, was not he the one taking all the risks of Bonaparte's possible vengeance? Otho demanded this with such vigor that the impresario finally yielded. But the curtain was not up on the next performance before M. Duvane was at Otho's dressing room, pale and trembling.

"The Corsican himself—he is in his box!" he gasped.

By RAYMOND S. SPEARS

The HANDY LINE



A Story of Old Mississippi

HOG PEN DAN shuffled into the Mendova gunstore one November evening and came along the dark aisle to the rope reels where he picked up the ends of several of the half-inch ropes. He opened the strands and worked the threads between thumb and forefinger. With unerring judgment he selected the best grade and lifted his head, beckoning the gunsmith who was working on an old 12 gage trombone shot-gun,

"How much?" Dan asked.

"Two-fifty a hundred," the storekeeper answered.

"I'll take five hundred feet," the river rat said, and forty pounds' weight was

reeled off the, till then, unbroken coil of seven hundred and fifty feet.

Hog Pen Dan shook his head when the gunsmith offered to bind the ends with stiff wire clips against raveling.

"I'll splice them right," the customer said, handing over three five dollar treasury certificates which had been saved one at a time.

Taking his change, Dan recoiled the rope in about forty-inch loops, tied the ends and coils with old trot line, ship-shape and, with his purchase draped over his left shoulder and against his right hip, returned along the dark aisle with no noticeable change of gait as he made his way to the street. Just a pause as he

looked from under his old slouch hat brim at the men in the light of the brass lamp around the great iron pot stove indicated he had noticed those natives and wanderers in the familiar meeting place.

"Huh!"/ Outboard Hank Cavey spat meditatively. "Wish he'd dallied a bit. Could 'a' had some fun with him."

"Likely he knew it," the gunsmith suggested.

"Seems like Dan's more near wuthless'n any other scoundrel from Cairo down," Hank said with some vindictiveness.

"Allus looks hongry, too," another added.

"Every trip down he buys a handy line," the gunsmith said, squinting into the worn, reddish mechanism of Tonio Degrado's buck shotter. "A five hundred-foot string of my best rope."

"Where you reckon he got fifteen savies all to onct?" Hank inquired. "He c'n save work to beat anybody, looks like. Hain't no occupation."

"Likely saves money the way he saves extra efforts," some one suggested. "He just don't spend it."

Only the gunsmith didn't chuckle or laugh, perhaps because he was wiping off rust where grease ought to have been on one of the best shooting guns he had ever handled when it was new. Tonio sure abused his firearms, as well as used them.

"I've seen him in a boat with a hull so rotten a cypress snag root plowed out a shaving four-foot long and an inch thick, slick's a steel chisel." Dan shrugged his shoulders. "Strakes wan't but two inches thick. He said hit left an inch of wood, above waterline, too. Jes' lazy, shiftless and no ambition—miserable!"

"He never lifted a sandbar hog, never sneaked a Gov'ment penny's worth, and won't even violate game laws," the gunsmith mused reflectively. And other listeners besides Tonio and Hank stirred uneasily, bristling; but as their sharp eyes surveyed the gunsmith's impassive countenance, they knew that of course he didn't mean anything personal.

"Takes a bath twict a week," another

man contributed to the Hog Pen Dan lore. "I know it for a fact. He settles water and decants it into a wash boiler to heat. We tied near him for a spell in Centennial Cutoff in September."

"Yeah, and changes his underwear both times," Tonio grimaced. "Hangs his washing on a line like an ol' woman, clothes pins in his teeth! Damned good teeth, too, like St. Francis white pearls, if you ask me."

"Glad to know about the baths," the gunsmith said, squinting. "I'd noticed somethin' dif'rent; couldn't quite place it; didn't use to wash."

Another laugh chortled in which the gunsmith did not join.

"What's on your mind?" Hank demanded.

"Ain't placed it yet," the gunsmith admitted. "As a general thing Dan never had more'n four bits to spare on the price of his rope. Tonight he had two-fifty change; and four bits jingled in his pocket, to boot."

"Knife, prob'ly."

"No, suh." The gunsmith shook his head. "I know bone handled steel rattling. This was silver."

"Don't look out some pirate'll kill Hog Pen fo' all profits," Tonio, who had done business with pearl shellers, prophesied.

Now that the gunstore boys took notice, it became a seven day's wonder that a river rat kept a bright new five hundred-foot coil of rope of the best quality, the one thing any river man could always respect even in the shackiest river outfit. Many a man who boasted he was clay lined and half bullfrog never bothered to have a handy line, let alone a new one every trip down, especially if he had to buy it with cash money.

Dan wasn't exactly unsocial. He just neglected to visit around much. If any one chanced to tie in the same eddy with him, he wasn't mean about it, but casual, sort of indifferent. Women said he had a nice face and wonderful eyes, regular turquoise blue. Men noticed he was sun blackened and lean.



HANK CAVEY and Tonio Degrado were notorious liquor transporters, Hank handling the boats and Tonio making deliveries up the bank. For a while both had been independents, rivals, and bothering each other a good deal. No one would have been surprised to hear the two had shot it out in a lonely bend. Instead, chancing to meet in the Mendova gunstore, always neutral ground, they decided to talk things over sensibly. Except in their business partnership, they weren't in the same class socially. Cavey was happy-go-lucky, a good sport and every one liked him as a companion.

Tonio was quite a different proposition, known as bad and dangerous, always carrying a gun for business, yet resenting the suspicion and contemptuous dread in which he was held even by those with whom he was thrown in illicit contacts. He had himself been afraid and worried at the chance of coming to grips with Hank Cavey, who had been one of the most successful market hunters who ever followed the wildfowl autumnal flights from the Upper Missouri to the Louisiana Gulf Coast swamps—one of the best and fastest shots. Migration treaty laws hadn't bothered Hank any more than Tonio's rivalry, for there were only twenty-eight Federal treaty enforcers to cover 3,000,000 square miles of happy hunting grounds. The liquor business was far more profitable, and Hank had scornfully cut into Tonio's line. When they struck their bargain Hank had told Tonio:

"I'll run the stuff on the river; you handle bank deliveries."

"Suits me," Tonio had said, but it rankled that Cavey had run him off the water, even though he made more money because Hank handled the 'shiners in their brakes and gave faster, better transportation. Then had come one hot outbreak between the two.

Tonio Degrado came aboard the Cavey boat in the Chute Bayou at Mendova, walking right in on Hank's family.

"Get out!" Hank Cavey ordered him,

hotly. "This boat's private. I don't do any business here."

Tonio could have understood no other kind of talk. Cavey's wife had been Colleen McGurkey of the Stop Sinning Mississippi River mission family. The Cavey's had two daughters: Patsey, fourteen years of age, and Mary-Lou, twelve. Tonio looked around the cabin, with its radio, its baby piano, its lace curtains, its clean, sweet atmosphere, realizing resentfully that he did not fit into that scheme of things, a family association utterly beyond his comprehension. Tonio departed in an angry mood.

The river rat's independence rankled in both Tonio and Hank Cavey. They could have used him, for he knew the water, was a good boatman and, with a little energy and nerve, he could have made a bigger income with them in a week than he could now claim in a year. Dan had the nerve, tying in at the mouth of the bayou and remaining there though liquor was being landed alongside at the Mud Bar.

"I'll kick him out," Tonio told Cavey. "I don't trust-a heem!"

"Better not," Cavey said. "Maybe we can slide from under and let him be the goat sometime. He's no stool pigeon."

Tonio laughed at that slick suggestion. Thinking it over, he tried to **work the** joke that way, out of **sheer meanness**. One foggy day Tonio found Dan's boat tied in without any one on board. Taking a jug of cheap shorty from his parked roadster, Tonio hid it under the shanty boat's bow deck, and then telephoned from uptown, anonymously, notifying the Federals. Two men came and searched the river rat's outfit but found no contraband. Recognizing Tonio's roadster, they crossed to it, and found the same jug of shorty in the rumble—ample excuse for confiscation.

Tonio had to walk till he bought a new machine, for some one had doublecrossed him. He raged over town, through streets and along the river front, snarling his hatred, trying to learn who had done that

switchback on him; but if any one knew, none told. Front Street laughed.

Hank Cavey himself wondered. Hog Pen Dan smiled, refusing to tell where he was when the trick was played and Cavey dared not press the matter lest he trap himself. The truth was, Hog Pen Dan had seen Patsey Cavey indignantly leaving his boat with the jug, putting it back into Tonio's roadster, thus saving the river rat a desperate predicament. Tonio suggested manhandling Dan for luck.

"Better keep that stuff to yourself," Cavey warned his partner, who complained bitterly at losing the roadster. "You're lucky they didn't slap six months on you, too. Only a fool would frame a man like that!"

Tonio could make no answer without a challenge to fight. He had heard a whisper that Cavey's family wanted him to quit the business.

"Maybe you wanta step out?" Tonio asked, obliquely.

"Sure I do," Cavey answered. "I'll sell to you any day, Tonio."

"No, you can't run out on me!" Tonio snarled, his eyes as dull as gray-black pearls. "Not on me you don't quit!"

Cavey turned on his heel, leaving his partner uncertain whether the business was broken up or not. Tonio needed Cavey more than Cavey needed him. The dispute opened the unhealed breach between the two, all over the useless Hog Pen Dan. Tonio headed for Dan's boat, but when he arrived at the Chute Bayou, the shack boater had just cut loose and was floating out into the Mississippi.

Dan had found work, doing odd jobs up town, which was a long step back from vagabondage. He did not fear the rascals, but the possibility that Cavey's daughter might again be led to interfere in his behalf left him no alternative but to seek some lonely reach or bend downstream. Whatever Tonio had had in mind was thus thwarted by Dan's tripping away in the current—at least checked for the time being.

A weather bureau flash had warned that the Ohio ice had loosened and the

runout was imminent. All river craft had a little time in which to prepare for the outrush, which was on the way. Every one must keep off the flood channel.

Tonio received an order from the Deer Head Lodge, a roadhouse in the bottoms, which needed a shipment. Tonio sent Cavey word to bring a load ahead of the ice fleet blockade, landing at the head of the bayou. Cavey sent no answer, but Tonio drove his truck to the rendezvous.

Rolled up in a tarp, Tonio waited for Cavey's heavy duty launch. A growling, gasping sound afloat awakened him, and he poked his head out to listen. The run-out had come sweeping by. Over the river resounded the grumbling of ice and drift, the bottoms vibrant with the echoes.

Tonio looked around. The night was dense with fog. All he knew was that Hank Cavey had not come, and the Deer Head crowd needed a shipment. To his mind his partner had walked out on him, all because he had married a mission boater's finicky daughter and was too damned good to treat a business partner like Tonio right. Tonio drank some strong wild grape wine. Thinking it over, he was sure Cavey had betrayed and deserted him.



ACCORDINGLY, Tonio sought revenge. His roadster seized, his dignity insulted, his profits threatened, and now his business probably ruined, he knew what he could do. Going down the pathway along the Chute Bayou, he came to Cavey's boat a mile away. A light shone behind the closely drawn curtains. That proved to Tonio that Hank Cavey was making ready to go up the bank. Accordingly, the skulker cut the two mooring lines, lifted the bow spar and pushed the shantyboat's nose out to catch the current, and silently, gently as a floating leaf, the craft swung into the lowering current and drifted down into Mendova Eddy, turned up in the reverse current and out into the passing ice and flotsam. He returned to the head of the Chute

Bayou, where he had to laugh at his own mistake—to himself in the dark.

Hank Cavey had been delayed by the ice but had now succeeded in making his way across through the running fleets when a jam slack gave him an open channel, dangerous but navigable, from the west to the east side, and so he arrived at the transfer place at last, hours late.

Tonio Degrado rolled back over the levee on his way. Hank Cavey drifted down the Chute Eddy in the dense fog to the ferry landing, unable to find his houseboat. Making fast, he headed up the bank on foot, flashlight in hand. Sure enough, the boat with his wife and two girls on board was gone.

The lines had been looped to tree trunks, bow and stern; both the ropes had been cut with a razor sharp blade and then the bow spar had been lifted and shoved till the hull caught the current and floated all clear down the dark waterway into the main river channel.

Frantic, Cavey rushed to the launch and went down to circle the Mud Bar eddy, hoping against hope to find his craft there; but the river was falling and the boat had sucked into the ice runout. Cavey had few enemies. He returned to the mooring and, light in hand, on his knees, he studied the footprints of the miscreant who had attacked him through his wife and daughters.

Tonio was of city slums in origin, not country woods bred as Hank Cavey had been. During the rivalry period, Hank had tracked Tonio Degrado through cane-brake traces, at river bank landings, across sandbars and read the signs, a literature beyond Tonio's knowledge. Cavey recognized the footprints, the lift and fall of heel and sole, the toeing in, the side-slip, the stride and pause—knew every detail of Tonio's angry furtiveness and cruel satisfaction as a good hunter always knows his quarry, by its tracks, even to what is on its mind.

"Tonio did it. He thought I had quit him." Hank Cavey pulled himself together. "If it's the last thing I do, I'll manhandle him now, right!"

With that, he went to the boat club garage for his roadster. An odd spell was working that night, and fate called Old Mississipp'. When Tonio delivered at Deer Head Lodge, if anything was doing, he always joined the festivities. The thick fog which cottoned over the river bottoms spread up the slopes of the ridges, favoring not only Tonio's enterprises but the eager, restlessly nosing doublecrossers, reward hunters and official law enforcers. When Hank swung his roadster into a timber brake niche in order to approach the Deer Head on foot, he discovered two men sneaking ahead of him, also on the quiet.

By their silhouettes he recognized Deputy Bob Skursen with a stool pigeon, Packy Gough; Tonio had said that scoundrel needed killing. The two carefully searched Tonio's converted sedan, finding nothing. Then they worked around to the cellar entrance of the roadhouse, a dangerous thing to do even on a foggy night. Tonio, ever uneasy, was on the gallery in the dark, and he recognized the two spies. With a catlike snarl, unable to restrain his rage, he drew his automatic and, at his first shot, Packy staggered back, grunting at each step. The deputy, his revolver ready in hand, tipped the muzzle up and poked old fashioned lead slugs into Tonio's silhouette which was faintly distinguishable against the pale curtained window, where he leaned over the balcony rail eagerly trying to send home another shot.

Tonio pitched to the ground and a loud crack when he landed meant either a broken arm or neck. It proved to be his neck, though a bullet through the heart had already killed him. The roadhouse lights went out, but Deputy Bob charged single handed into the place, and presently the lights came back on so that a posse could be summoned from Mendova to search and seize the liquor, closing the joint right.

Hank circled wide and did not meet the two big official cars. He stopped at the curb of the river drive and listened to the runout, the creaking of strained timbers,

the crunch of grinding cakes, the voices of swirling surface eddies hurtling by, each piece of ice in the dark with the edges crushed up like rims of craters in the moon.

"In that raunching are my wife and girls!" the river man moaned. "And I couldn't even kill Tonio myself!"

"Probably jes' as well," the dark hour police patrol comforted him. "If a man needs killin', what dif'rence who does it? Bob Skursen's a good feller. Better him promoted than you hung for a good job, Hank."

The police car slipped through the gloom as quietly as it had come, departing unheeded by Hank.

"Good God!" the cop exclaimed. "Listen to the river—we'll have to send notices down the line right away. We'll warn towns to watch for that drifting shantyboat."

At the same time, Sheriff Tazewell sat for hours at his court house office desk notifying every sheriff down the river on both sides, and begged each of them, as a personal friend, fellow politician and public servant, to send out special deputies, to watch all the way down. He had worked out a current speed schedule so that all could tell about how soon the cabinboat or its crushed wreck might be expected to pass given points where a watch could be maintained.

No word reached Hog Pen Dan, who had tied in at Otter Point, out on the tip of a peninsula in a horseshoe bend eight miles or so through the timber from the levee, and just as far as he could get from any other human, fisherman, trapper, moonshiner or recluse. There the river rat spent his days foraging for something to eat and struggling to regain the nerve that he had lost. At night, he dragged his half-inch handy line from under the bed where he kept it, splicing the ends neatly and working over every inch of the five-hundred-foot length, twisting and bending it in his hands to make it soft, supple, ready for service.

Nice, clean and *bought*, that fine strand meant things to him he could never put

into words. He hadn't started in life as a river rat. When he came to the river he had money enough for a good cabinboat, outfit, supplies. His spirit bore a wound he did not yet fully realize was so serious. Back among his own people he had been unfit for the struggle to survive socially, financially and as the head of a family. He never could forget entirely the hateful scorn of his ambitious wife who had, instead of giving him courage and strength, sapped his hopes and added to his burdens, laughing bitterly at what she thought was weakness and not sensitiveness, till at last he slunk away broken, seeking peace.



NO BRIEF struggle, Dan's! Going down with the majestic current, each time he returned upstream to trip again, he was more dejected in heart and resources. Old Mississipp' grew upon him. That mighty indifference to storms and fair weather had set him an example.

Now the chill of the water indicated the Ohio ice was coming. Then he caught a sparkle in the sunshine on the tawny surface upstream, and hurtling by darted a tiny iceberg with a tail of fog, like a streamer of steam, twisting from a dripping, crystal knob. Other glimmers appeared, coming thicker and faster, every one of them leaving the gray smoke twirling as it passed. The vast rushing surface was salted with the ice and peppered with black fragments of drift, all surging by in the current beginning to swagger with the Spring thaw rise.

Mockingbirds were flying with flocks of bluejays, learning to laugh, and Baltimore orioles were ringing their songs in the balmy sunshine. Impatient wild fowl were crowding northward and eagles perched on the dead shore snags waited for another appetite to send them awing.

Dan did live pretty much on scrapple, as Hank Cavey had taunted him, cornmeal boiled with shredded fresh pork, molded and cooled, and then sliced to fry in a hot pan greased with bacon. With now and then a fish, a swamp rabbit, per-

haps bee tree comb honey and hickory or pecan nuts, a man could live for a few cents a day—actually five or ten cents; but Dan was on his way up from the bottom now. His boat was sound, tight and good, and the junk he had picked up would probably bring more than a hundred dollars. In every way he was better off than when he came afloat, a hopeless, shamed and miserable fugitive from failure.

The head of the ice fleet came down about midnight. The squeaking, growling, yelling of grinding and straining awakened him. He lay awake listening, conscious of the fact that he was no longer Hog Pen Dan, though probably the name would stick as long as he remained on the river. His boat was good, light, dry, wholly comfortable. Plenty of grub was on board and no matter how snarling the runout, in his eddy he was safe, satisfied and no longer unhappy. A man can outlive his grief, he thought, especially down Old Mississipp'.

Shortly before dawn, Dan built a hot fire in his kitchen stove, dipped four balls of sage sausage out of an earthenware jar, and fried them in a hot spider. When the grease was running, he sliced off scrapple and trimmed the shape to fit in around among the patties of meat. The coffee in a percolator began to plop and fume the kitchen with its share of fragrance. When the lamplight suddenly dimmed because of brighter dawn, he sat at his table eating in comfort. No meal had ever tasted better than this breakfast. For the first time since he had landed at the New Orleans wharf on his first trip and found that his three-hundred-dollar shantyboat would sell for only twenty dollars, while the merciless second hand furniture dealers offered only five dollars or so for what had cost nearly a hundred, the positive dread of hungry poverty no longer burdened him.

Through eating, the dishes washed and the kitchen picked up, he looked around the cabin. Time had been when he had neglected to air his blankets and keep things in order. Now he was clean and

neat again, just a little too complacent, perhaps, to escape the attention of Old Man River. Going out on the stern deck, leaning back against the cabin, he watched the night fog break up and scatter in tufts and flocks before the morning sunshine and eddying zephyrs, while every patch cast a shadow on the hurtling jetsam or golden eddy. Suddenly the fog lifted and became clouds that thinned like steam in the balmy morning. The vast phenomenon of the runout spread for miles up the bend and stretched for miles down the undulations of the crossing into another bend below.

Glancing idly hither and yon, suddenly the cabinboater stiffened, stepping to the stern bumper, tense and startled as he gazed up the bend. Caught in the ice and drift was a large cabinboat, white with red trimmings and a dark, brick-red hull. Huddled on its bow deck was a woman sitting in a wicker chair with two girls clutched in her arms.

"The Caveys!" the river man muttered, and as if they had heard his startled whisper, the three faces turned to him and the two girls threw up their hands, one with something white in it—a fog damp handkerchief, hailing him. Just so they had always greeted a neighbor, even when it was just Hog Pen Dan in a stained canvas rag shack.

The whole vast runout surface was circling and twisting about. Just beyond the jeopardized cabinboat was a huge black cottonwood snag with far reaching prongs which slashed back and forth, one crumpling the kitchen galley chimney as the spectator looked. The wonder was the Cavey craft had not already been torn to pieces, hull crushed and cabin slashed, as that huge monster clawed about it.

For an instant the man stood glancing around, stunned. Then he rushed into the cabin, snatched up the loop he had riven in the rope and carried it up the bank where he dropped it over the two-foot hickory stump on the bottom level. He cast off his mooring lines, threw off the gangplank tie to the bow bumper and dropped his sweeps over their

pins. He swung the coil of handy line to the big, shallow, light junk box on the roof where it would pay out as the boat floated up the eddy to swing into the mass of the ice and drift—after that Old Man River must point the way, the things to do.

Pulling on the sweeps, the long, soft coils creeping over the stern, Dan leaned into the board sweeps and his doomed hull rose to its impulse like a skiff. He ran into the loose edge ice, rasped for a few yards against the rush and then swerved around, already engulfed by an encircling swirl.



THEN the river man reached into the junk box and caught up the coil of handy line, lifted it over his head to rest on his left shoulder and against his right hip—perhaps to tangle him in its snarl; but he must chance that as he leaped from the bow to a strand of log raft. Then he ran along a steamboat keel beam and thence sprang to a tipping cake of ice, on to another and over the side of a houseboat that was flat on the water, just awash—somehow seeing which way to jump while he flipped loop after loop of the rope coil over his head or jerked the stretched curve straighter by giving a lifting surge against it.

The three on the bow deck of the boat he was racing to meet sprang to their feet, one of the girls taking down a throw line from its hook under the eaves, the mother taking a boat hook from its spikes and Patsey standing at the bow bumper looking around, ready for anything, her eyes bright and her lips smiling to see a brave man at his big job.

The dash had been exactly timed, rightly inspired. Once Dan faltered as he slipped, but his left hand caught him and he leaped erect again. When he reached the edge of the pool of open water in which the hull was resting, for an instant he stood nonplused for it was too far to jump. Out of the corner of his eye he caught sight of a black, snaky arm. It was the longest branch of the cottonwood

snag coming as if to sweep him off his feet, but he caught it like a bar with his hands and it swung him quickly to the Cavey boat deck, where he let go. The limb slashed through the corner of the cabin like a dull blade.

Turning, Dan dropped the coil of rope from his shoulder to the deck, careful that its loops rested all clear and flat. Patsey, who had seen handy lines in service, ran into the cabin and returned with a kettle in one hand and a bucket of water in the other.

Mrs. Cavey, her pike pole in hand, stepped to the left corner of the deck and pushed a log block around the bow away from the side. In the meanwhile the river man had been hauling in the handy line, recovering it as the current carried them nearer and nearer to the stump to which the shore end was looped, jerking the strand and throwing running loops to clear spikes in a ship's timber and to escape the entangling snarl of a floating island of wood débris.

For a few yards the drifting carried the cabin boat opposite the stump, and in that moment Dan took a turn, then two turns around the oar pin head on the left bow, and the hundred yards of half-inch rope drew taut, with a whang, humming. The coils squeaked tight on the five-inch square white oak head, Dan glancing about and then poking rope at the top of the stretching, shrinking strand around the wood. As the line slipped fire tongues darted out, and the friction smoke rose blue. Standing by, braving the slash of the whip if it broke, Patsey poured a cool stream from the kettle—the one thing she could do then to help. Mrs. Cavey, after one glance, turned with set face and, as the hull swung against the wide drift and ice pack, set the pole to scatter the stuff the best she could around the bow, easing the press toward the calm and placid eddy.

As the half-inch line slipped it fuzzed out like an angry cat's tail, the fiber ends scorched black, yards and rods of it, strained to the last pound of its strength, but when it could hold no more, let go by

the man who had studied his handy line these fallow years till he knew it—and could do with a half-inch strand what a rope four times as strong would have failed to do at the command of a less competent man.

Judging by the noise and the strain, they were all doomed, the rope singing a swan song and the hoarse ice chanking its grinding edges, black drift prodding and pounding, and at the rope end with such feelings as a man has when he has done the utmost he can and must give over his task, spent, Dan dropped the spliced loop on the pin head and let the slip coils snatch around into the last hold. The frayed line came taut, lifted all clear for that free four hundred and ninety feet, and sagged back.

"She's broke!" Dan cried out, lifting his eyes to the girls he feared for; but they laughed at him with tears in their eyes.

"She is *not* broke!" Mrs. Cavey cried, smiling. "We're in the eddy, man, and it's just slacked!"

That was the truth. The handy line had held, pulling the hull across current, and the flotsam it could not plow through had swung with it, an acre of drift ice, a floating island carried out of the torrent into the placid safety of the reverse current. Dan could only stare at the golden sand bar to which the limp line was springing them. The other three looked back at the crushing mass from which they had been snatched.

"Oh, your boat, Dan!" Patsey cried.

He turned to watch with them as his cabin, with all that he owned in the world, sucked now into the milling, grinding turmoil of a squeeze. The hull was lifted, twisted, rent till they saw the strakes splintered lengthwise while the cabin crumpled and broke apart, sinking into the deep as the flotsam scattered again, rushing down the crossing.

The river man shrugged his shoulders. He knew one must pay for his pleasures as for his sins, and how small the price—come to think of it—had he paid for their look of gratitude. And the three women,

quick with intuition, no longer even smiling, saw in the man something of joy beyond all expression, as if a tremendous privilege had been his, left bereft of all by Old Mississipp'—but his soul restored to him again.

Presently the tension relaxed. Dan hauled in the frayed handy line and the two girls coiled it on the deck. When the bow came to the bank they ran out the mooring lines which had been cut, making them fast to the snag and stump where Dan had been moored when they appeared.

"Daddy Hank'll be worried," Patsey said. "How can we get word to him, Mr. Dan?"

"I can cut down the neck to the levee," he answered. "They're brushing the right-of-way there, and they have a telephone in the office tent, I was noticing. I'll go—it's eight miles and will take a little time."

"Patsey'll go with you, Mr. Dan," Mrs. Cavey said. "You take good care of her, and she'll be glad to go."

"Yes, indeedy!" The young girl laughed, putting her hand in his.

So they started immediately and on the way discussed the problem of how to reach Hank Cavey at Mendova.



NIGHT had fallen. The roar of the running ice was audible deep in the bottom brakes—four hundred miles of devastating menace and terror, like an enormous serpent creeping and squirming down the channel, more than half a mile wide, squeezing into every bend, the sheets of ice like scales, swirling in every crossing, scattering in the swift jets and crowding together in the slow, retarded water.

At the contract levee camp, the two found the office tent and put in the telephone call.

"Wait there, Patsey," the operator said. "When I've found your father I'll call you again."

With the flash that the Caveys had been rescued by a river rat's heroism and

Hog Pen Dan's handy line down at Otter Point, the news was rushed to Hank Cavey. They found him at Palura's Front Street place huddled at an open window in the dark, gazing into the murk of the river gloom, where he had been nearly motionless a night, a day and another night.

"Old Mississipp's sent word," the messenger greeted, harshly, and the wretched man who had not stirred when the light was switched on sprang to his feet and leaned against the wall, braced for any blow.

"You're wanted on the phone." The hotel proprietor nodded to the room instrument; Cavey hesitated, leaned on the back of a chair and then, sitting on the foot of the bed, taking the receiver, he mustered his courage to speak.

"Patsey—Patsey, you made the shore?" Cavey cried.

"Yes, indeedy, boat and all, daddy." The girl laughed. "Mr. Dan—Hog Pen Dan, you know—ran out his handy line and swung us through the fleet ice to Otter Point eddy, with only a scratch on the cabin where a snag limb cut the corner."

"Our boat on that half-inch string!" Cavey cried. "Dan did that?"

"She smoked and frayed like a cat's tail!" the girl said. "She squealed on the slips, but she held."

"Tell your mother I'll be down on the tail of the ice," Hank choked. "The river flavor's soured on me, and it'll be my last trip. We'll go up the bank, Patsey, and straight. And would you mind, darlin', apologize to Dan for me, tell him that I'm sorry for all the laughs I've had about his handy line?"

"Sure!" She chuckled, lingering on the word, her voice rich.

He retorted, choking in relief—

"Tell him our boat is his, or he can take the pick of my fleet of motors, with a good stake to set him up."

"And an inch handy line to boot, daddy?" Patsey teased.

"I'll laugh at that!" Cavey cried, chuckling, tears rolling down his cheeks. "Any line I can throw in to help, Patsey!"

When Cavey came down in his heavy duty motorboat on the last of the Ohio runout, he looked at Dan and saw nothing in his poise to ridicule or despise ever again. Dan would have none of the rewards. In his money belt was carfare up the bank and home again. He spent the evening in the Mendova gunstore, sitting as one of the boys—and that was a long way back. Mostly they minded their own business, but the gunsmith looked over his glasses with polite curiosity as he paused in his job of washing thick grease out of the mechanism of a .22 automatic to oil it with thin oil so it wouldn't jam.

"So the handy line stood it, Dan?" he inquired.

"She whipped taut and hummed like a cyclone." Dan nodded assent. "The thread ends scorched black for a hundred feet, fraying and stretching plenty. When the end came I looped the niggerhead and for the last time in my life, boys, I lost hope. When she should have snapped the strain eased and she slacked instead. I could die now, with faith."

When Dan had gone out, taking the nine o'clock train north, the boys smoked on, pondering.

"Funny thing about that damned bit of string," the gunstore man said. "He went hungry to buy the first one. He had been just drifting along; for ten years a handy line was the one respectable thing about him, and then it seemed to grow on him, its spirit in his heart, kind of swinging him in the flotsam till it brought him ashore again."

"Anyway you look at it," one of the boys said with a touch of exasperation, "this damned Old Mississipp's a funny proposition!"

A Story of the Big Tops

BANK ON BETSY



By FRANCIS BEVERLY KELLEY

THOMAS HAMMOND, elephant boss of Cooper's Consolidated Circuses, sat hunched in a chair in his chief's private railroad car and scowled at a calendar on the desk before him.

Cooper, tall, solidly built, with a chest like one of Hammond's bulls, stood at the windows and looked out. The circus train rattled on. It was Sunday and the show's destination was fifty miles away. Unloading in preparation for the Monday engagement would begin immediately upon arrival. Without removing a cigar from one corner of his mouth, Cooper half turned his head and shot a question at the frowning figure.

"Well, does Benton City see elephants on July Fourth or not? We've got to get this thing settled once and for all. We're due in an hour or two and you'll be busy for the rest of the day."

Hammond's eyes remained glued on the calendar. Fourth of July was a week away. Memories of previous Independence Days marched like a dreadful parade across his mind—recollections of gay holiday crowds; boisterous, thoughtless boys; firecrackers and terrified elephants. A costly stampede in Madisonville, three persons injured in Saint Anthony, a run-away at Charlesburg. Firecrackers—harmless playthings that made July

Fourth a day of horrors for the keeper of twelve ponderous pachyderms. At last he spoke—

"I've heard tell o' shows that never took their bulls outa th' cars on th' Fourth."

The circus owner wheeled around, almost losing his balance as the car swayed suddenly.

"I don't care what other shows do! I want to know what we're going to do. Look here, Hammond—I'd be the laughing stock of every show on wheels if I played Benton City without my elephants. I want to make that spot again some day and I don't intend to disappoint the customers by hiding a dozen elephants in the cars—just because I'm afraid of a few firecrackers."

"I was thinkin'," said Hammond, "you might give th' papers a story explainin' how dangerous it is to light firecrackers around elephants."

Cooper groaned.

"Lord, what a break for me that you're not a press agent! How many people do you suppose would come near my show on the Fourth of July if they thought there was likely to be trouble with the bulls? The psychology of a newspaper story like that would cost us ten thousand dollars in empty seats. What a showman!"

The bull keeper grunted.

"I may not know much about psychology, but I know what might happen if a couple o' cannon crackers was to go off under Pasha or that other new bull you bought from Sempleton. You know, them two English elephants besides bein' jest naturally mean an' devilish are liable to take offense at th' way we Americans celebrate July Fourth."

"Ha!" boomed Cooper, a note of triumph in his voice. "If it's Emir and Pasha you're worried about, just rest easy. You got a bull that can handle half a dozen like those two new punks."

"Dutch?"

"No, Betsy. She's the best bull I ever owned. In fact, she's the first I ever owned and she never caused me any trouble. Betsy's led that herd too many

years to let a couple of newcomers get away with any murder."

Hammond shuddered. Murder. He didn't like the word. Hammond understood elephants. Twenty years of living with the great, rubber colored brutes had taught him to love them—and to look out for accidents. He knew that when an elephant loses its head it becomes a towering menace of steam roller temerity and he knew, as do all elephant trainers and keepers, that while these giants generally are good natured, they fear what they do not understand. Hammond had spent considerable time in winter quarters trying to accustom the Cooper elephants to certain things that might terrify them when the show was on the road.

Tin cans were rattled on the cement floors of the barns, papers rustled, guns fired; dogs were made to bark at the very feet of the timid titans, geese and chickens were driven through the herd and flags were waved in front of them. The result of these pre-season precautions was a herd of well behaved elephants, with the exception of Pasha and Emir who had been purchased from a prominent British showman the preceding Spring. There had been no time to acclimate them to American circus difficulties before the road season had begun.

"Yes, siree. You can bank on Betsy to handle that herd in case of trouble," the circus owner promised.

"I'm not so sure about that old bull," said Hammond. "She has her flighty spells along with th' rest o' th' gang an' she's been restless lately. Betsy's gettin' too all-fired old."

Cooper stood to his full six feet. Betsy was his favorite bull.

"Getting too old! Don't be a numbskull. You're the one who's getting too old. That bull's got a lot of good years left in her. You don't know how to handle her. Why, when I worked Betsy I never had to touch a bull hook. She never failed to respond to my spoken command. I'd be willing to bet ten grand that if Betsy ever gets frightened and starts off on the loose I can do more simply by calling out

her name^a than you can do with a block and tackle."

Hammond dug a letter opener into the green blotter on his chief's desk.

"And I'd be willin' to take that bet," he said quietly. "Make it twenty dollars."

"You're on." Cooper offered his hand. "Tom, I think we'll do some real business in Benton City. It'll be a glorious Fourth and you can forget your worries about the bulls. Just take ordinary precautions. In an emergency you can bank on Betsy."

The seven-ton lady under discussion at that moment was placidly eating hay within the narrow confines of one of the elephant cars. Betsy was old. Her skin hung in heavy wrinkles and her legs were not quite as strong as they had been a season ago. In fact, Betsy no longer could do a stand on her hind legs as did all the other bulls lined up along one side of the hippodrome track at the conclusion of the elephant acts. Instead, the aged leader of the herd was permitted to stand first in the line, bending one front knee like a high school horse.

But despite her age and minor infirmities, Betsy ruled her tiny domain with marked discipline and few were the elephants that could stand up under the impact of her coiled trunk suddenly loosed with the force of a pile driver.

Seventy-five years and more had passed before the sharp eyes of the old elephant. She had been piloting four tons of feminine pulchritude through green glades in her native India when Jenny Lind rode in Barnum's carriage to her initial American triumph in Battery Park. Cooper had bought Betsy from a mud show shortly after her importation from Bengal. He had trained her himself and worked her in the act for eighteen years, during which a staunch friendship had sprung up between them. Betsy proved a valuable asset to the show and would work for any good bull boss under trying conditions, but as far as her affections were concerned she was a one-man elephant. Cooper was her god. In her wise old head were memories of the early days when Cooper's tremendous traveling city was a small

wagon show and she walked overland from town to town. Stamped upon her brain were recollections of nights when country roads were a sea of mud and only an elephant could drag the heavy wagons from the clutches of the mire.

As Betsy munched her hay the train lurched. One of the elephant keepers, then engaged in breaking open a bale of hay, stumbled within reach of Pasha's trunk. Like a huge, gray serpent, the trunk wrapped around the man and hoisted him aloft, bumping his head on the roof of the car. In another moment the victim would be dashed to the floor and trampled under the feet of the murder bent beast.}

Betsy's tiny eyes took in the situation at a glance. Her trunk coiled and struck the side of Pasha's head with a thud that fairly shook the car. Stunned, the younger bull dropped his victim and trumpeted shrilly. The man scrambled to safety beneath the sheltering legs of the herd leader. Other elephants in the crowded car paid little attention to the incident. They had seen Betsy mete out justice before.

The bull keeper summoned one of Hammond's assistants and related his narrow escape.

"If it wasn't for Betsy you'd be pickin' me up with a shovel," he said, fondly slapping the wrinkled side of his benefactress. "I tell ya, that new bull's a mean customer."

"Sure is," agreed the other man. "Th' boss got him from an English show an' he ain't used to train travel. Makes him nervous to be cooped up in here with th' cars movin' an' all. Pasha's sore 'cause we got his buddy in th' other car. You better give them English bulls a wide berth till they get to feelin' at home around this show."

"Yeah. Makin' them devils at home on this show'll be like makin' an elephant comfortable at a Democratic convention. They don't like it here an' you can bet your last dime we ain't seen th' worst of it yet."

"Don't I know it? We'll have a swell

time with them babies on th' Fourth of July!"



AT DAWN on the morning of July Fourth, the brilliantly painted cars of Cooper's Consolidated lay like a long yellow snake in the Benton City yards. Thomas Hammond was asleep in his bunk. Dreams of ten years past invaded his slumber and he thought he was lying in a shell hole. The booming of distant cannon and the crack of scattered rifle shots were audible. Unconsciously he drew up his knees and hunched his shoulders, one hand reaching toward a livid scar on his neck. Wham! A shell burst directly over his head. He jerked convulsively and sat up in bed. He heard voices outside the car and peered from the small open window that served his tiny compartment. A trio of small boys demanded a full view of the great gray hulks whose heads were partially visible through the high, screened windows of the elephant cars.

"Hey, mister, bring out yer elephunts."

Hammond yawned.

Bang! Another report blazed within an inch of the car window, only this time it was a giant firecracker instead of a German shell and Thomas Hammond remembered what day it was.

"Damn those kids!" he muttered, reaching for his clothes. "I bet I don't forget this stand very soon."

He dressed hurriedly and opened the door between his compartment and the elephant section of the car. Wham! A firecracker exploded a few inches from one of the little windows. Pasha whimpered like a huge baby, his five tons of bone and muscle swaying from side to side like a titanic hootchie-cootchie dancer.

Hammond walked over to the frightened bull.

"Never mind, old-timer. Nothin's goin' to hurt any o' Tom Hammond's bulls. You'll get used to th' firecrackers an' it ain't near so bad outside where you can see around."

Then a searching trunk found its way

into his coat pocket and he pivoted to find Betsy hunting for sweets.

"I've got nothin' now, old girl," he said, "but if we get through this day without a riot, you an' me'll throw a real party—sure, with carrots an' a couple o' apple pies! You keep your gang outa trouble today an' I'll be more than glad to pay th' boss a twenty-dollar bet."

Betsy blinked.

That morning provided the bull keepers with enough thrills to last out the season. At frequent intervals throughout the mile tramp from the railroad runs to the show ground young Americans demonstrated their patriotism to the extreme disapproval of twelve elephants in general and two in particular. Twice Pasha and Emir broke from the line and only quick thinking on the part of the keepers, who milled Betsy, Eva, Modock, Princess and other veterans of the herd among the terrified insurgents, prevented a wild stampede through crowded city streets.

Once on the lot, the task of quieting the elephants was aggravated by the fact that the menagerie tent was not yet ready to accommodate them and they had to be stationed out in the open at the mercy of certain spectators who persisted in throwing firecrackers at the feet of the herd. The giants didn't look frightened and it was fun to see them pick up their feet with a speed not commonly associated with elephants. Sometimes they trumpeted loudly and the crowd withdrew a few paces. At last the animal top was up and the bulls could be led inside and away from the holiday crowd that swarmed over the lot, drinking in the magic of circus day.

At eleven o'clock Cooper paused at the picket line.

"Well, I see you got the bulls in without any trouble."

"Trouble?" snapped the elephant boss. "If we'd had any more trouble, every farmer for twenty miles around would have a nice fresh elephant planted in his garden. Trouble! Some day when you're tellin' me about psychology, you might explain what makes people want to throw firecrackers at elephants!"

"Have any trouble with the two new bulls?"

"Yeah. They was th' cause o' most of it. Say, that Pasha bull tried to kill one o' th' boys in th' cars yesterday. Betsy slapped him just as he was ready to slam th' kid down an' tramp on him."

Cooper grinned.

"Sure, you can bank on Betsy every time. Needn't worry while you got her to handle the herd."

"Betsy's been a big help lately," the bull keeper admitted. "But I've seen her have flighty spells too, an' here's hopin' she don't get one of 'em today."

"Well, if she does, you can call me. I know how to talk to Betsy."

With that the circus owner walked over to the towering herd leader and patted her trunk. It was obvious that Betsy was pleased beyond measure. She put her trunk in her ear and emitted one of those tiny squeals that elephants never effect unless they are very, very happy.

"Still bettin' me twenty bucks that you can talk Betsy outa makin' trouble if th' occasion ever comes up?" demanded Hammond.

"I'd gladly make it fifty!" replied the circus owner, petting his seven-ton favorite.

Hammond stared at his asphalt colored titans and meditated. He was accustomed to his chief's self-confidence and put little faith in his boast concerning Betsy. Still, it might not be a bad idea to have the boss around the menagerie when the matinee crowd streamed in between one and two o'clock. If trouble arose among the herd Cooper could share some of the responsibility.

"I wonder if you'd mind bein' in here while th' afternoon crowd's walkin' through, Mr. Cooper. If anything was to happen I'd feel a lot better with you here."

The showman shot a furtive glance at his elephant boss. He wondered if the man was afraid of his bulls. He had half a mind to do as Hammond requested, but suddenly remembered an appointment.

"Sorry, Tom," he said. "I've been asked to speak at the Sons of '76 banquet

downtown this noon. Great boost for the show—they're going to broadcast the whole works over a radio station here. I can't be back on the lot before 2:30 at the earliest."

A picture of the circus owner at the banquet flashed across the bull keeper's mind. Cooper, monarch of the big tops—Cooper comparing the spirit of '76 to the dauntless energy behind present day circusdom—Cooper, tall, well proportioned, with his rather handsome face, gray hair, heavy black brows, telling his audience how favorably impressed he was with their fair city—and reminding them almost in the same breath that they must avail themselves of the fleeting opportunity to see his tented city and its wealth of wonders.

"But you'll get along fine," continued Cooper, looking at his watch. "I have to ramble now. See you a little later. Remember," he called back over his shoulder as he hurried past a long line of cages and toward the main entrance, "in a pinch you can bank on Betsy!"



BETSY at that moment was thoroughly enjoying her bulbous self with a bucket of assorted vegetables, including a generous sprinkling of beloved carrots. Farther down the line Pasha amused himself by stealing the ill tempered Emir's hay. Emir, in turn, slyly whisked it back again when his companion wasn't looking.

"Hey, Bossy! Flag's up—let's eat!"

Hammond lifted a section of canvas sidewall and peered toward the cook and dining tents. A white flag floated from one of the center poles, silent testimony that the noon meal was ready.

"O.K, Slim," called Hammond. "Now, Sam, you an' Dave an' Pinky keep a good eye on them bulls. I'll be back in fifteen minutes so you can go eat. Watch everything," he ordered, his experienced eyes traveling swiftly from one end of the elephant picket line to the other.

Halfway to the cook tent, he was confronted by a tall, slim man whom he knew

as the circus legal adjuster, or "fixer", as he is dubbed in spangleland.

"Morning, Bossy. Want to see you a minute," said the thin man.

"What's up, Joe?"

"I just found out who's been throwing some of the fireworks at your bulls."

"Yeah? You mean you pinched some of them kids that was worryin' us outside?"

"They weren't all kids, Bossy," said the legal adjuster. "The chief detective picked up a fellow and brought him to me. He's one of the men you fired for boozing back in Ohio territory."

Hammond's eyes narrowed; his jaws squared.

"I remember him—said he'd get even. Was that dopey lookin' guy with him?"

"You mean the other fellow you fired? No, this man was alone when the chief picked him up. He was giving firecrackers to kids and telling them to throw them at the bulls. His buddy may be hanging around waiting for a chance to make trouble later on. This Fourth of July stuff is made to order for them."

"Them two guys wouldn't stop at anything," said Hammond. "See if you can make your prisoner talk. In the meantime, I'll tell my boys to be on the lookout for that dopey pal of his."

"I doubt if they'd recognize him, Bossy. This other fellow was all dolled up—the chief watched him for quite a spell before he finally figured who he was," explained the legal adjuster. "Well, don't worry too much. The city department's detailing sixteen cops to me this afternoon and twenty-four tonight. That won't be too many by a long shot. Seen the Old Man?"

"He's just left for downtown to make a speech at some patriotic blowout. Said he'd be back about 2:30. Th' bulls will be through workin' by quarter to three. I can handle 'em all right—if your dicks can keep those plants from usin' shotguns on 'em."

"Well, I guess there isn't any use sending for Cooper now," said the adjuster, reflecting upon the circus owner's passion for speaking at public functions. "Send

for me or Cap Smith if you need help."

"Thanks, I will."

Colonial patriots probably would have stirred violently in their graves could they have heard what Bossy Hammond muttered about Independence Day as he hurried toward the dining top that warm July noon.



WHEN the doors were opened at one o'clock the midway was a solid mass of sweltering humanity. In the ticket wagons a green river of currency lapped at the ankles of the ticket sellers as they swept money from the counters in their efforts to accommodate the crowd and keep them moving.

Inside the menagerie top, Thomas Hammond's bull keepers stood like sentries at intervals along the picket line. The long blue arm of the law apprehended a youth in the act of tossing a small firecracker into the hippopotamus den.

The story of the arrest spread and no more trouble occurred until the last group of spectators started to leave the menagerie tent en route to the big top for the matinée performance. Then from some obscure spot in the crowd a large cannoncracker came hurtling through the air to land within a few inches of Dutch, a five-ton bull, whose keeper was strapping a bejeweled howdah on his back at that moment. Dutch was putting out his trunk to garner the interesting red object when it flew to pieces in a loud blast. A short, shrill cry escaped the bull as he lurched into standing position, throwing the keeper against Emir, who responded with a blow that knocked the man into a section of the giraffe corral fourteen feet away. It was very difficult to quiet the section of the herd where the firecracker had landed. Then a bugle sounded out on the lot. Last call . . .

A moment later the shrill whistle of the equestrian director signaled the beginning of the show and the band blared forth in a fanfare of martial strains. The pageant was in full swing, with the elephants bringing up the rear of the procession,

when from a point high in the reserved seat section a long string of lighted firecrackers sailed over the heads of the crowd and landed on the hippodrome track at the feet of Pasha. The frightened giant dropped the tail of the elephant in front of him and glared at the exploding red cylinders. *Crack—crack—wham!* Pasha broke from the line, a terrified leader of ten other mammoths that followed him, sheep fashion, in a mad dash down the hippodrome track.

But Betsy did not budge. She stood dumbfounded, like a startled old woman, watching her brood desert her in their sudden break for liberty. A blow from the powerful trunk of Dutch as he ran past her caught Betsy on the side of the head, bringing her out of her momentary daze and knocking her spangled crown askew over one eye.

Then the brain of the aged herd leader began to function again. Walking over to a quarter pole, the old elephant calmly pushed the head gear back into position so that her sight was unimpaired. Whirling, she ran down the track to meet the deserters head-on. Ushers shouted at frightened spectators, assuring them that there was very little danger if they would keep their seats in the stands.

Pasha had led the insurgents two-thirds the length of the oval without finding an opening to his liking. Next time around he would make one. Betsy stopped near the end of the tent and planted four pillar-like legs firmly on the tanbark track, awaiting the runaway giant, Pasha. Twelve tons of bone and muscle collided with a tremendous thud that shook the ground beneath them. Pasha's speed pushed Betsy through four rows of vacated chairs, but the impact left Pasha so stunned that it was not difficult to lead him out into the menagerie tent, there to be hobbled with heavy chains against further outbreak that day. By milling the other elephants around Betsy, bull keepers were able to quiet them and soon they were lined up again as though nothing had happened.

Few words had escaped the lips of ten

thousand frightened circus patrons as they watched the battle of the titans. Now a resonant voice cut the stillness of the big top. "It was Hammond commanding his small battalion of elephant keepers and trainers.

"To th' rings, you fools! To th' rings! Get th' bulls' minds on th' routine o' th' acts!"

The order was obeyed and eleven elephants were hurried into the three rings of Cooper's Consolidated to lumber through their paces as usual. Everything was going beautifully once more. The man whose firecrackers had started the stampede was caught and handcuffed as he tried to drop down from the top row of seats during the confusion. The anxiety of the crowd had subsided and the efforts of the bulls were meeting with spirited applause. In the center ring, Modock danced on a tub while the band played "Yankee Doodle". Eva, Princess and Betsy waltzed around the tanbark enclosure, waving flags and colored streamers. When the acts were over, the bulls were hurried from the rings and lined up for their final display on the hippodrome track.

At this juncture the crowd had learned from ushers and concession men that Betsy was the name of the elephantine heroine who had nipped in the bud a dreaded stampede. Cries of "We want Betsy! Give the little girl a hand!" went up from all sections of the canvas auditorium. Bossy Hammond smiled and patted Betsy lovingly. Then, turning to his first assistant, he ordered—

"Take th' rest o' th' bulls out, Slim, while Betsy an' me takes a little bow."

But the bull keeper's decision to lead Betsy back to the center of the track for a bow was a grave mistake. While the seven-ton heroine bent one knee and lowered her majestic head amid a tumult of applause, she spied an entrancing red cylinder directly in front of her. Now, almost anybody could have told Betsy that the object of her curiosity was a giant firecracker, but nobody saw it except Betsy. It had failed to explode with the

others that had sent Pasha and the other bulls on their brief stampede, but it smoldered inside. Betsy picked it up with the finger-like end of her trunk. It felt warm and a bit queer to the old herd leader and she was about to discard it when it flew apart with a terrific bang!

With the explosion, Betsy forgot that she was a civilized circus elephant. Gone was the even temper that had established her leadership over less trusted bulls. She was at once a frightened creature of the jungle—a primitive beast whose muddled brain told her to run.

And she ran. Like an angry gray mountain, she sped back through the middle ring and out of the performers' entrance of the big top. A group of wire walkers, clowns and aerialists attired in pink tights made way for her. Properties flew in all directions as the stampeding mammoth cleared her way through the circus backyard. Bossy Hammond hastily mounted a horse and galloped off after his runaway bull.

At the edge of the lot a crowd scattered to give Betsy the proverbial green light. She ran out on to the pavement and raced down the street, but before she had gone fifty yards she heard a voice above the din of the city street. It was a familiar voice. She slowed down to a fast walk and the voice became more distinct as she drew closer to it. In front of a radio store she stopped. On the sidewalk was a large box and from its depths rolled the voice of Betsy's god.

"And now, my friends," it said, "I

leave with you the best wishes of the entire personnel of Cooper's Consolidated—from Atom, our smallest monkey, to Betsy, our largest and oldest trouper. I deeply appreciate—"

Betsy! The bewildered titan in front of the radio cabinet had heard Cooper distinctly pronounce her name. Her brain cleared and out of the delirium of the past five minutes was crystallized a desire to be in the reassuring presence of her old trainer. A strange voice came from the big box now and Betsy wheeled around to behold Tom Hammond dismounting and walking toward her.

"Come on, Betsy. Let's you an' me go home. That's a good girl. Won't let nothin' happen to you. Good girl, Betsy."

She was following the bull keeper now—following him back to the lot where instinct told her she would find Cooper.

As Hammond slid into his place at dinner early that evening, his chief entered the dining tent.

"Hello, Tom," he said. "I just got back—had to spend some time with the Sons of '76. Say, I hear that Betsy stopped Pasha on stampede. Mighty glad nobody was hurt and that they caught that rascal. Didn't I tell you that you can bank on that Betsy bull every time?"

"Yeah." Hammond coughed. "Yeah, you sure can bank on Betsy. An' you ain't heard nothin' yet!" he added, fumbling in his pocket for a twenty-dollar bill.



A Novelette

of the

Sea

There is a province in this country where for several weeks in the year a hot, dusty wind blows from the north. Any crime of violence committed during this period is dealt with with particular leniency; a murderer, for instance, may be imprisoned but not hanged. The wind is said to drive even normally phlegmatic persons to the verge of madness, like love, I suppose.

—FROM A TRAVELER'S DIARY

THERE are days within the latitudes of the tropics that are not only enervating but are profoundly depressing as well, creating an exhaustion of the mind as well as of the body. One becomes irritable, but too listless to give audible vent to irritation; one broods, and harbors dark suspicions of all life and mankind. The moods of nature reflect themselves not only upon the senses of the individual but even upon the appearances and actions of what have been called inanimate objects. A vessel sailing through gloomy days seems weary and oppressed, filled with tired creakings and moving across the waters with a positive reluctance. There is a pall upon all things.

There was such a pall upon all things on the morning of the 16th of March, in the year 1905, between the 18th and 19th parallels of north latitude and several hundred miles to the westward of the Cape Verde Islands. The visibility until well along in the afternoon of that day was extremely poor, a warm, sticky drizzle falling from a leaden sky, and a mod-



erate westerly wind bearing along dark squalls of rain at irregular intervals.

The sea itself was calm, little more than a flat, gray-green swell, turgid and treacherous to the view and giving an impression of immense solidity, untouched by the constant drizzle but thickly pitted and roiled when the heavier rains drove down with gush of stronger air and a threshing roar. There was a distinct touch of heat from the dull sky, though no sun was visible, and this seemed in some way to muffle all thought and deaden all noise, much as a fog might have done.

Mr. Lamont, first officer of the Ameri-



The SQUALL

By ALBERT
RICHARD WETJEN

can bark *Randolph Perry*, bound from New Orleans to Dakar, French Senegal, had the feeling of being remote from himself, of being removed to a distance from which he could gloomily observe his material body pacing up and down the weather poop of the big vessel. Added to this feeling was a sense of acute discomfort, induced by the light perspiration in which he was bathed, and a vague annoyance with the ship because of her apparent sluggishness. It is not improbable that these various moods and feelings, created in Mr. Lamont by the very atmosphere about him, were the real cause

of his first suspicions. There was, certainly, in the beginning, no real reason for him to regard the strange schooner with such resentful hostility.

It happened soon after five bells, in the forenoon watch, when the *Randolph Perry* lifted the spars of the other vessel lying hove to off her port bow. Mr. Lamont stared at the distant, swaying masts with a frowning annoyance, as if it offended him there should be another ship on the same sea as himself. And then, as he regarded her, he began to speculate as to the reason for her being hove to in such reasonable weather. Repairs to her rigging, perhaps? One of the intermittent squalls may have damaged her, although there was little enough force to the wind they brought. She may have sprung a small leak needing immediate attention, or perhaps her cargo had shifted. For any one of a number of things a vessel might well halt in her journey.

Yet Mr. Lamont felt growing within him a dark and unreasonable suspicion that on this occasion none of the ordinary causes was responsible. He could scarcely define his actual emotions, and he certainly made no attempt to dismiss them. Approaching the schooner and passing her on the port side, at a distance of about half a mile, Mr. Lamont signaled her. There was no response and, adjusting his glasses, the now thoroughly annoyed officer, thinking he had been deliberately

ignored, was somewhat astonished to find no sign of life upon the other vessel's decks.

This statement, obviously, must be taken with certain reservations. The visibility was extremely poor, the drizzling rain kept fogging up the glasses, and at the moment when the *Randolph Perry* was actually abreast of the schooner a squall swept down and hissed between the ships, momentarily blotting them from each other's view and leaving behind a fine, brief mist to further cloud the vision. Mr. Lamont, however, felt unreasonably positive.

He was on the verge of taking his glasses from his eyes, to give an irritable command to the helmsman, when a very significant thing occurred. A small flag came abruptly to view, hoisting jerkily at the mizzenmast as if it needed to rest between each upward leap. Focusing his glasses anew, Mr. Lamont felt his suspicions gratified when he discovered this flag to be an American ensign, flying reversed, which was an accepted international sign of distress. And then, almost at the moment the first officer identified the ensign, it was swiftly and smoothly hauled down and out of sight. There was only one thing to do after this extraordinary procedure, and with mingled feelings of excitement and relief Mr. Lamont hove to and sent a sailor to rouse the captain.

There was, as it happened, no need for this precaution. Disturbed by the changed motion of the *Randolph Perry*, or perhaps made restive and suspicious by the conditions of the atmosphere that bothered his first officer, Captain Hardy came up the companion from the main cabin before the messenger could reach the scuttle on the way to call him. He paused in the opening for a moment, to gaze to windward and then aloft, and with a faint frown between his brows he stepped out on the poop, dismissed the messenger with a nod, and made his way to where Mr. Lamont stood by the rail, staring at the schooner as if some distinct magnetic force riveted his gaze.



THERE was a pause. Captain Hardy was a silent man, partially so by instinct and partially so from habit, the latter induced in him by long years of sea discipline and the conscious dignity that comes with command. He was not very much above middle height, somewhat sparsely built, deliberate and even grave in all his movements. His gray hair was somewhat thin but his neatly clipped mustaches and his pointed beard were thick and stiff, as if partaking of his own pride and importance. His hands were heavily veined and deeply tanned, almost mahogany in color, as was the skin above his beard. His eyes were blue, almost a china blue, but very clear and hard. He wore a peaked cap, without any emblem, and a neat, well pressed uniform suit of thin serge, in the side pockets of which he invariably thrust his hands. He had not worn an oilskin to come on deck since, like his first officer, he preferred the sticky wetness of the drizzle to the uncomfortable heat an oilskin would produce, with its even stickier perspiration.

There was an air about this man of almost tragic loneliness, of aloofness; an almost god-like conscious superiority such as descended like a mantle upon most of those who enjoyed the despotical command of large sailing vessels. His voice reflected this, being clear and precise, his words pronounced with great distinctness and in a tone that seemed to assume they could not be questioned, as, certainly, upon the *Randolph Perry* they could not be. Although some element of curiosity must have gripped him at this moment he did not speak first, but stood staring across the gray-green water toward the schooner where she lifted sluggishly to the swell. Mr. Lamont, not yet aware the captain stood beside him, continued to peer fixedly through his glasses, his limbs faintly quivering with excitement and apprehension.

"It's confoundly queer!" he muttered to himself. And then lowering the glasses from his eyes he observed Captain Hardy. "I think you should look into this, sir!"

he protested, after a short pause. Captain Hardy held out his hand and took the glasses. He made no comment. He remained immovable, except for his involuntary swaying back and forth as the vessel lifted and fell, the drizzle misting his mustaches and beard beneath the out-thrust glasses. Mr. Lamont pulled his uniform cap lower over his eyes and scowled darkly. He somewhat resented the captain's indifference, the assumption that there was no need to inquire what was wrong, that he would, as a matter of course, be fully informed.

Mr. Lamont coughed and began to explain with decided reluctance, which he immediately forgot as imagination and excitement milled within him. He was a Welshman, inclined to be impulsive even under normal conditions, with a decided sense of the dramatic. His slate colored eyes snapped and sparkled once he was under way; his burly brown mustache literally quivered; and he constantly elevated his stocky shoulders and flung out his hands, much as a Latin might have done, gesturing, making quick patterns in the air.

"It's most extraordinary!" he exploded breathlessly. Captain Hardy remained quiet for some time.

"You are sure about the ensign?" he inquired at last, lowering the glasses and staring fixedly at his first officer.

"Positive," asserted Mr. Lamont. "Positive, sir. I could scarcely believe my eyes. It went halfway up—very jerkily—and then came down on the run."

Captain Hardy's eyes puckered up and he stared reflectively at the swells running by his vessel.

"Very well," he said at last. He handed the glasses back to his first officer and thrust his hands in his side pockets. "We'll see."

"Shall I get the longboat overside, sir?" Mr. Lamont wanted to know. He was all nerves and quiverings now. It wasn't often a mystery like this jumped right in a fellow's face, so to speak, on the high seas. There might even be salvage in it.

"Yes, Mr. Lamont. The longboat," agreed the captain.

"How many men shall I take, sir?"

Captain Hardy considered, thoughtful, as if debating.

"I shall go myself," he announced finally. "Four good men and the bosun will do."

Mr. Lamont stared at him.

"You're going yourself, sir?" It would have been extremely unusual for any master to leave his own vessel in mid-ocean, no matter what the circumstances, but for Captain Hardy to propose doing so was an extraordinary thing.

"Yourself, sir?" echoed Mr. Lamont.

He pulled angrily at his uniform cap. It was preposterous! A first officer's job, that's what! Didn't the Old Man think he could manage the longboat or something? Hadn't he unearthed this mystery? He felt it belonged to him and inwardly grew indignant.

"Yes, I will go myself," observed the captain mildly. "There might be a difficult situation over there."

He was entirely innocent of any reflection upon his first officer, and Mr. Lamont also missed any inference he might have drawn from the remark. He hardly heard it. His imagination was off on another tangent.

"Hadn't I better arm the men, sir?"



CAPTAIN HARDY turned and stared fixedly at him, profoundly astonished.

"Arm the men?"

Mr. Lamont gave his cap another vicious jerk and slapped one hand on the wet teak rail.

"Don't you see? Can't tell what might happen—what has happened. Mutiny—anything!"

"Mutiny?" repeated Captain Hardy. A vague anger stirred in him. "Mutiny? In the North Atlantic? Twentieth Century? You'll be talking of pirates next."

"Well, that was just a suggestion, sir. Can't ever tell. There's something queer going on, that's certain."

"Arm the men?" said the captain. He

frowned and thrust his hands deeper into his side pockets. "Nonsense!"

He walked firmly aft, toward the wheel, to get a compass bearing. The drizzle might thicken to a real dense haze, or a sudden fog come up, or the weather make. He wanted to know just where to find the schooner and where to find his own vessel in such an eventuality.

Mr. Lamont stood staring after him, feeling somewhat foolish and with his ardor somewhat dampened. He muttered gruffly to himself and then strode quickly to the forward rail upon which he slapped his hands and over which he leaned, addressing the watch on the main deck, gathered near the break of the poop, talking in low voices and staring across the water.

"The longboat, Bosun," said the first officer severely. "And we'll need four good men with yourself." The sailors looked up at him, falling silent, and brimming with a new indignation he slapped the rail again. "Well, what are you waiting for?" His voice was sharp. The men moved with sudden, nervous alacrity.

Mr. Lamont frowned and gnawed his mustache. It was all right for the Old Man to talk so, but there might be something very wrong with that schooner. Still no sign of life on her decks, hove to as she was. That ensign going up and then running down. Extraordinary!

The first officer debated with himself for a moment and then, filled with a new determination, went hurriedly below to his room where he rummaged in the bottom drawer below his trunk, finally producing a small, brightly nicked revolver spotted here and there with rust.

Captain Hardy was standing by the forward taffrail when Mr. Lamont joined him again, staring down on the main deck and watching the men busy with the longboat.

"It may be all nonsense, sir," said the first officer, "but you should take this anyway." He pulled the gun from his pocket and offered it on his extended

palm, his face a little red. Captain Hardy stared first at him and then at the weapon, visibly annoyed. It was a cardinal principal of his theory of command that it was unnecessary for any good officer to use a weapon, and he had managed to do without one ever since he had been to sea.

"Have you gone off your head, Mr. Lamont?" said the captain stiffly. He was about to say other cutting things when the boatswain came on the poop and approached them, so he added instead, "Very well then. If it will please you," and hastily pocketed the gun. He did not feel disposed to argue before the boatswain, and truth to tell the feel of the revolver against his side gave him a vague relief. He had a strange idea, however, that if the day had been bright, sunny, and reasonably cool, not even the excitable Mr. Lamont would have thought of going armed to the schooner. As it was . . . He muttered in his beard and shrugged, dismissing the matter. The confounded weather was enough to give any one the creeps!

"Longboat's ready, sir," Mr. Lamont reported.



CAPTAIN HARDY gave a few last instructions, donned a light oilskin coat he had sent a man below for, and gravely descended to the main deck where the ladder had been dropped overside to the boat. He seated himself firmly in the stern sheet and gripped the tiller, immediately conscious of the difference in motion as the small craft lifted and fell almost sickeningly upon the flat swells. He gestured with his free hand and the boat pushed off, sliding down a treacherous green slope, where the wind momentarily stopped, and climbing up another as the oars bit water, bent and lifted clear. The four rowers grunted in unison. In the bow the boatswain worried a chew of tobacco from a thick black plug and stared ahead.

The bulwarks of the *Randolph Perry*, near the waist, were lined with faces,

watching intently. The negro cook stood on one of the bitts, lifted up so a portion of his white apron showed. His shaven head trickled with moisture and his eyes rolled in the gloom of his face.

The men talked quietly. Mr. Lamont paced feverishly up and down the poop, halting at intervals to watch the boat. The second mate, coming on deck from his room, went to the helmsman to learn what all the excitement was about.

Captain Hardy was somewhat annoyed with himself now he was in the longboat and actually launched upon his expedition. He should have sent Mr. Lamont to investigate this strange schooner. It was a first officer's job and almost a right. He could not accurately discover among his emotions and thoughts any real reason why he should have undertaken the task himself. Perhaps it had been unusual curiosity, perhaps merely a desire for action, anything to escape from the depression and listlessness of the weather. He was not sure at the time and even afterward he could not determine his impulse, although he had moments when he was inclined to put it all down to a manner of divine guidance. He always was sure Mr. Lamont would not have been able to meet the situation.

As they approached the mysterious schooner, lying hove to and rolling somewhat heavily, there was still no sign of life upon her decks. From the time Mr. Lamont had noticed the ensign being hoisted to the time Captain Hardy was on his way, perhaps half an hour had elapsed. There had been ample opportunity for those on board the schooner to show themselves, as they obviously should have done upon noticing the *Randolph Perry* had stopped and lowered a boat. Captain Hardy felt an apprehension growing upon him as he viewed the deserted vessel, and he was aware of a worried look upon the face of the boatswain forward when it was once turned inquiringly toward him.

Crossing the schooner's stern, they could read her name, painted in big white letters, *Esmerald*—New York, and Cap-

tain Hardy, now he was close to her, could see she was riding somewhat low in the water, as if heavily laden or waterlogged. Her wheel, apparently, was lashed. All her boats seemed to be in place, although that was a matter of guesswork, as they could only gain a full view of her decks when they rose on the crest of a swell and the *Esmerald* at the same time rolled toward them, with a squattering of treacly water and a jarring of her rigging. She seemed to be in good condition, her rigging and sails all in good order, her hatches battened down. And in fact the first actual sign upon which Captain Hardy could pin his apprehension was found in the near sea.

"There's a lot of sharks about," said the boatswain suddenly. He pointed and then turned.

Captain Hardy nodded to show he had heard and his keen eyes almost at once picked out several dark triangular fins shirring through the sea, crossing and crisscrossing restlessly. Peculiar, he thought. Most peculiar! Unwillingly he recalled he had heard stories to the effect that sharks would follow a doomed vessel. Probably nonsense. Forecastle yarns.

He gripped the tiller with a sense of distinct irritation, moved it quickly and the boat sheered alongside, the men deftly fending her away from the gray painted wall of the hull until an appropriate moment arrived. The boatswain made a leap, grasped the top of the rail and hauled himself to the deck. He did not pause to look around but hastily dropped a rope down, by which Captain Hardy, with an agility remarkable for one of his years, aided himself on board.

He speculated a moment whether he should have the boat made fast alongside or led aft to ride astern, but deciding the schooner was rolling too much and his visit to her was, as yet, of unknown duration, he ordered the men to lay off a short way and wait until he summoned them, an easy enough task with only flat, unbroken swells to contend with.



NOW he was on board the *Esmerald* Captain Hardy was somewhat undecided as to his next step. He thought it would be well to send the boatswain forward to look into the forecabin, while he himself went aft, and he was about to take such a course when the decision was taken from him. He heard what he thought was the faint but impatient slamming of a door, obviously somewhere down in the main cabin, and then a few muffled words given in an angry voice. The boatswain, quite alarmed, spat out his quid and, forgetting himself, gripped the captain's arm.

"What was that, sir?"

"Ah!" said the captain, considerably startled. He felt the sense of a mystery brooding over him. The whole proceeding smacked of something uncanny and it seemed to him that upon this strange ship there lurked a gloominess not altogether to be ascribed to the dark sky and the rain; almost a menace. The boatswain, letting go the captain's arm, placed his hand on the rail, instantly to snatch it away with a sharp exclamation as if he had been stung. Captain Hardy glanced round instinctively and cold fingers ran down his spine. Neither man spoke. The hard wood of the rail was gashed in two places, obviously by a sharp instrument, as if some one had struck vicious downward blows. The gashes were glaringly fresh, with dark spots each side. Captain Hardy put out a tentative finger and one of the spots smeared red. As fresh as that!

There was no time to make any further investigation, for at that moment the disturbed captain felt the presence of another individual and, returning his gaze toward the poop, he was startled to observe a man standing at the head of the port companion and gazing intently down at him. The actual physical presence of another man, of a member of this strange vessel's crew, calmed Captain Hardy, acted as it were like a douche of cold water upon his befogged and mystified mind. He addressed the boat-

swain in a low voice, over his shoulder.

"Stay here. I will call you if I need you."

The boatswain said nothing, thunder-struck by the discovery on the rail, and Captain Hardy advanced toward the poop as the stranger upon it came uncertainly down the companion steps to meet him. They drew together very close to the foot of the companion, staring at each other, and Captain Hardy experienced a vagrant tinge of amusement to note the other was wearing a master's peaked cap and a uniform jacket with gold braid around the cuffs, apparently new and yet queerly much too large and loose for the individual who had it on. What amused Captain Hardy was the idea that it was necessary for a master to wear such a jacket to identify himself, and especially the master of a schooner such as the *Esmerald*. He himself, master of one of the largest four masted barks afloat, never donned a uniform of rank unless making a formal call upon port officials or receiving them on board.

"What is it you want?" said the stranger abruptly.

He seemed breathless, seemed to be laboring under some tension that was almost too much for him. His voice, very musical and deep, was distinctly hostile and cold. Captain Hardy inwardly stiffened, and yet experienced a strong astonishment. What did he want? Believing himself to be addressing another shipmaster, he controlled a desire to speak acidly.

"I am Captain Hardy," he explained with slow gravity. "My vessel, the *Randolph Perry*, is lying yonder. My first officer tells me he saw a distress signal hoisted at your mizzen, and as we were unable to gain any response whatever to our own signals I have come to investigate."

"There's been no distress signals hoisted here," answered the other shortly. "I'm sorry you've had all this trouble."

Captain Hardy buried his hands deeper in his side pockets, experiencing something of a shock as his fingers came into

contact with the revolver Mr. Lamont had given him. It encouraged him, however, to proceed, aided him to stifle a growing anger.

"I consider your whole attitude to be most extraordinary, sir," he said stiffly. "I can not believe my first officer to be a liar."

The other seemed to gain control of himself with an effort and when he next spoke his tone was milder, almost placating.

"We've had a little trouble on board," he said apologetically, "but it's all straightened out now. I'm greatly obliged for your solicitude, but I assure you there's no need for you to delay your voyage." He apparently chose his words with care. Captain Hardy compressed his lips.

"Doesn't it strike you I should be curious to observe none of your crew about?" he inquired with a trace of sarcasm. "You mentioned trouble, I think?"



THE other hesitated, shot a look over the captain's shoulder to where the boatswain stood, gazing blankly at him. Then he returned his glance to his interrogator and forced a short laugh. There hovered about him an impression of desperation.

"You must excuse my abruptness, Captain," he said. "I'll explain matters. My name's Dawson—Captain Dawson." He held out his hand and with some reluctance the other took it and shook it briefly.

"I'm three weeks out of New York with grain alcohol for Lisbon. Had a lot of bad weather and to cap it all my men were taken sick. That's why I was hoping you'd ignore the foolish act of one of them, who is still a little delirious, in hoisting an ensign. I had hoped you would continue your voyage for your own sake."

"I'm afraid I don't understand."

"Well, you see, the sickness we have is contagious."

"Ah!" said Captain Hardy.

That seemed to explain everything. He was always more than willing to try to understand whatever another master mariner might do or not do, or how he might act. He considered the members of the craft owed a strong loyalty to each other. And he could understand, to a degree, Captain Dawson's obvious nervousness, his gruffness, even his neglect to reply properly to a signal from another vessel. With a whole crew sick, as they must be since they were not around, any master would forget things, act a trifle strange.

"I see," said Captain Hardy, with more warmth. "What is it you have on board, sir? I may be able to advise you. I have had considerable experience with diseases in one way and another." He was, although he disguised it, a little worried. It would not do for him to return to the *Randolph Perry* being the possible bearer of some disastrous disease. But now he was involved he could only accept the matter and take such precautions as he might to minimize the danger. "What is it?" he repeated urgently.

"Pretty bad," said Captain Dawson. "It's blackwater fever."

Captain Hardy stared at him, profoundly astonished.

"Blackwater? Out of New York?"

The other was confused, hesitating. Captain Hardy eyed him sternly and filled now with the gravest suspicions. The man was obviously lying, guessing. Didn't know what he was talking about.

"We shipped a mulatto in the crew and I suppose the rest took it from him."

"But, good Lord! Blackwater fever isn't contagious. It's transferred by an insect bite, some mosquito. A smudge pot in your focsle and cabins would eliminate all danger."

"Not contagious?" echoed the other. He seemed stunned, floundering.

"You must certainly let me see your sick men," continued Captain Hardy warmly. "I've had very considerable experience with blackwater. Perhaps

you are mistaken in your diagnosis?"

The other made a sort of helpless gesture.

"That's possible, of course."

"I can lend you some men to enable you to reach port, sir. I think I'd better signal my vessel."

He half turned, to proceed back to where his boatswain waited, but he found his arm caught in an iron grip.

"We can discuss that after awhile," Captain Dawson said hoarsely. He seemed fighting for time. "Won't you come below now and have a drink? I can't tell you how relieved I am to have an offer of help."

Captain Hardy stood irresolute for a moment. He was definitely certain there was something gravely amiss on the *Esmerald*, something that would have to be cleared up. He was practically certain now that Captain Dawson was not what he pretended to be, and the story of blackwater fever laying low the whole crew was unbelievably weak and thin. It was a question with Captain Hardy whether he should call his boat alongside and take charge of the schooner until he really discovered what ailed her, or accede to Captain Dawson's entreaty and endeavor to learn more from him before taking the plunge. He would, after all, be in a serious position if he forcibly took over another vessel and then discovered nothing seriously wrong with her.

He did not want to involve any of his men in bloodshed either, and he did not want to appear unduly alarmed. It might, after all, be possible for him to solve this riddle in a calm and practical way, without violence. If any need arose there was the boatswain waiting for him to call and he had—he blessed Mr. Lamont in that moment—a good weapon in his pocket.

"I shall be delighted," he said finally, and without further hesitation he followed his host up the companion and toward the main cabin scuttle, with only one warning backward glance toward the boatswain who shifted uneasily at seeing him depart.



AS THE two men came to the opening of the scuttle, Dawson stepped back to give Captain Hardy precedence, and a particularly heavy roll of the schooner at that moment caused the latter to stumble a trifle and grip the wet scuttle edge to steady himself. This action brought his gaze unbidden toward the after poop deck for a fraction of a second, and he saw there, apparently wedged in the scuppers opposite the main cabin skylight, what seemed to be a shapeless heap of canvas. It was not this that caused him to draw a quick breath, however, but the sight of the finger tips of a hand protruding from beneath the canvas, and a little to one side of the finger tips a splash of red that might easily have been the fringe of an ensign, or blood.

There came over Captain Hardy then a peculiar but strong conviction that if he gave any sign of alarm, or betrayed for an instant what he had seen, the man behind him would strike him. He sensed a vicious tenseness in the other, a grim sort of determination, a murderous control, a holding in. It was as if a volcano were about to burst through a thin cool crust and erupt molten lava upon all who stood near. It needed but a touch. This sensation was further heightened by a glimpse of the other man's hand, which gripped the scuttle edge near his own. It was rigid and hard, the knuckles ivory white beneath a heavily browned skin, as if the owner drew some control from the very feel of the wood.

The whole incident passed in a matter of moments: the approach to the scuttle; the roll of the *Esmerald*; the vision; the impression; and then Captain Hardy, more profoundly moved than he had been in years, and with a cold hand of stark fear about his heart, went on down the companion without perceptible pause.

The main cabin was in a semi-gloom, partly because the skylights above were closed, and partly because the day itself was gloomy and dark. The long table in the center, of scarred mahogany, seemed like a pool of ink, shot with vagrant

beams of opalescence that moved with the motion of the vessel. Narrow backed swivel chairs were placed about this table at intervals, all of them creaking, one or two loose ones in small motion as the ship pitched and rolled. A clock ticked loudly from where it was screwed into one bulkhead. A desk occupied some space, a sort of small buffet ran thwartships across one end of the table.

The whole place reeked queerly of tobacco and man smells, and also of other things that Captain Hardy could not define, elusive, sweet, almost sickening. There were many noises, as is usual in a vessel, the creaking of beams, the wash of water outside the hull; squattering sounds as the undershot stern sat down in the sea. He felt as if he were descending into a pit from which there was little escape, filled with dark mystery and dark menace.

"Will you sit down?" his host said abruptly, and Captain Hardy sank to the nearest chair, the one closest to the companion, thrusting his hands into his pockets again and tightly gripping Mr. Lamont's revolver.

He did not remember ever having found himself in such a situation before. He felt, for a while, almost totally unnerved, supported alone by his dignity and sense of position. His host crossed to the small buffet, procured glasses and a bottle and returned to the table with them, dropping with an audible sigh of relief into a chair at the captain's right. He poured drinks, his hand quite steady, and it seemed to the captain that by the very act of coming below, getting out of sight of the sky and sea, possibly out of sight of the *Randolph Perry*, the other had assumed a new attitude, had gained a distinct strength and confidence.

"Is that enough?" he said, lifting the bottle and eyeing Captain Hardy with an inscrutable look. His voice was quite calm now, cool even, with a trace of hardness.

"Quite enough," answered the captain, and he removed his left hand to take the glass, a motion which ap-

parently escaped the other's observation.

They drank silently, Captain Hardy with deliberation and in small sips, the other at a gulp. There was a brief pause. Captain Hardy waited.

"To be quite frank," began the other, "I'm in a much worse fix than I admitted before. I had trouble with my crew almost immediately after leaving port. There were several quarrels in the focsle, which resulted in one man being killed. Another was washed overboard off Cape Hatteras. Then this disease broke out—I suppose it couldn't have been black-water from what you say—but it had all the symptoms and they dropped off like flies. The last man left alive, except myself—he was the mate—dropped dead right after attempting to hoist that ensign."

Captain Hardy said nothing. He sat motionless, austere, bearded, cold, like a god in judgment. The opalescent lights shifted and swam across the dark pool of the table.

"I hauled the ensign down," the other confessed, with a trace of a smile. "I was not myself, I admit. The worry and anxiety, Captain—you can understand." He attempted a laugh but it held no mirth. "I had a foolish idea I'd bring this vessel in myself. I didn't want to have to pay salvage money. That's one reason why I ignored your signals. I hoped you'd pass on and leave me alone. I was mad, I admit. And I apologize. But now, if you can lend me three or four men—any you can spare—I'll be delighted to accept your help and get into port. What do you say?"



CAPTAIN HARDY was silent for a long time, considering the matter, weighing his suspicions, studying the man before him. His senses now acutely alert he became aware of the power of the other. The man was strongly built, with wide shoulders and an extremely deep chest. His hair, a light chestnut in shade, was a mass of close crisp curls about a fine head. His clean shaven jaw was square but somehow

weak, his upper lip somewhat long, his nose straight and narrow.

The most peculiar thing about him, however, was his eyes. They were almost green, or rather a bluey green that was somewhat disconcerting to gaze into, somehow unnatural. Very large eyes for a man, deepset beneath strong, straight brows. For perhaps the first time in his life Captain Hardy discovered some one he could not stare down, and the fact annoyed him.

He was strongly conscious of the fact that the other was an exceptional type. Ruthless, he would say. Probably in a petulant manner. A man to let nothing stop him when he desired a certain end. There was will power in the high brow, in the peculiar eyes; a trace of weakness in the jaw and the almost feminine softness of the lips. Yet there seemed to go out from him an emanation of cold confidence, enfolding the observer, beating down his resistance.

This sense of silent but none the less strong determination to dominate had a strong effect upon Captain Hardy. It tightened him. The iron within him rose to meet the challenge. He ceased to be afraid, to be apprehensive. He became icily cold, logical, almost vitally interested in defeating the other in a battle of wills alone. It was if his whole crew had abruptly mutined, leaving him isolated to whip them to submission and bring the voyage to a successful conclusion. He believed he had taken the other's measure. Was the request for aid a mere bluff?

"I shall have to think about it," said Captain Hardy, after a long silence. He was very quiet now, very grave and deliberate. He turned his whisky glass round and round between the fingers of his left hand. "I cannot, as a licensed ship master, give you any aid until you have satisfactorily cleared up several points which seem to me to be suspicious." He lifted his hand as the other was about to speak. "Pray hear me out, sir. I do not say that I disbelieve your story. I do not say that I believe it. But you must perceive my doubts. Your whole actions and

your attitude have been suspicious, to say the least.

"First: in comparatively calm weather, my vessel comes upon your craft hove to and without a crew visible upon deck. Second: my first officer signals you and receives no response. Third: there is an ensign raised in a peculiar manner, to be hurriedly hauled down. Fourth: upon approaching you and boarding you, I find no one to meet me. Fifth: you eventually appear and seem anxious for me to go. Sixth: you tell me a story of a contagious disease that has decimated your crew. Seventh: you now admit you remain alone on this vessel. Frankly, 'sir, I would like to make a complete investigation of your condition before I commit myself."

The other was silent for a moment, his eyes subtly menacing, his jaw tight. The men both were motionless, and in that brief period when they were motionless Captain Hardy heard a faint sound emanate from one of the closed cabins that were set about the main cabin, obviously the quarters for officers. A splintering noise, followed by a light cough. He gave no sign, however, although he knew, as well as if he had been told, that a woman was on the other side of that closed door. The sweet, almost sickening scents he had detected when he had first come below were now explained.

"I see," said Dawson at last. His voice was subdued. "What is it you want then?"

"Have you the ship's papers?" inquired Captain Hardy. "And—er—any of your own that might identify you?"

"Don't you think you're rather insulting?"

"Possibly. But I consider the situation so unusual as to demand unusual language."

"Very well."

The other rose, and Captain Hardy for the first time was aware of his fine height and his youth. Nearly six feet tall. He could not have been more than twenty-four or five. Only his eyes seemed old. He crossed to one of the closed cabin

doors, opened it and stepped inside, closing it after him. There was soon the noise of a drawer being pulled out.

Captain Hardy waited, relaxing a little and glancing around. He had, he believed, the other man in a corner. He had him trapped; desperate. He was convinced he would be unable to prove his story. He was half inclined to call his boat alongside immediately and end the matter, but the fascination of probing deeper yet, of forcing the other to confess some real truth was too strong. And then Captain Hardy had a quiet desire to prove again his contention that a man had no need of weapons to handle other men, that practically every situation could be controlled without the use of force.

It might be said that for the first time in a good many years Captain Hardy was secretly enjoying an adventure. There is no exact explaining of the motives that move men, but it is extremely probably that on any other day but this present one the captain would have acted differently, acted decisively, crisply. But the warm, sticky weather, the dullness, the lassitude, the ominous brooding pall that seemed to lay on all things set normal reactions awry.



PERHAPS a second or so after his companion had pulled open the drawer within the closed cabin, Captain Hardy rose and, fingering his beard, made a few steps of survey. He only made a few steps because he came upon another discovery that occupied his attention and considerably perturbed him anew. Along one stretch of bulkhead, between two of the closed cabin doors, there was a small settee of dark leather. It was so gloomy in the main cabin that he had not been aware of the existence of this settee, hidden as it was in the shadow; but now, striking his knee against the edge in the confined space, the captain reached down to prod the obstruction and identify it. And as he did so he caught a vagrant glimmer of light upon metal, and reaching cautiously forward found to his astonishment that he held the hilt of a cutlass, such as were

often carried upon sailing vessels trading along the more dubious coasts.

He lifted the weapon to the light, perceiving it was sheathed, and taking his right hand from his pocket for the first time since entering the main cabin, he cautiously drew the blade free. The sound of the drawer closing in the cabin where Dawson had gone was enough to make the captain hurriedly replace the steel in its scabbard and lay the whole back on the settee, before resuming his seat. But he had seen enough, for the steel of the blade was horribly stained and a red smear had fastened itself upon his fingers.

This discovery, which shocked him more than he would have been willing to admit, set up a new train of thought. If the blood upon the cutlass was fresh, as the blood upon the rail had undoubtedly been, then there had been violence on board the *Esmerald* within a comparatively short time. And the discovery of a cutlass brought to mind again those two deep gashes which the boatswain had observed as they boarded. Further, those shark fins cutting the water alongside the hull! The captain's conclusions were gruesome, but he forced himself to a semblance of indifference as the cabin door opened and Dawson appeared once more, bearing a large black tin box.

"I hope these will satisfy you," he said shortly and, opening the box, he sorted out several papers and laid them on the table.

Captain Hardy stared at his powerful brown hands for a moment with horrified fascination, and then recalling himself he picked up the papers and perused them, not without some misgivings at the idea of taking his gaze from his host.

He had come definitely to the decision that it would be folly to delay any longer in bringing his men aboard, even if there was a chance of bloodshed. He began to believe that the other had had a very good reason for persuading him below, getting him out of sight of the deck. A desperate man, once realizing he was cornered, would be apt to attempt desperate things. Intimidation possibly, even murder.

Captain Hardy began to feel a grave concern for his own safety, and the fact that he managed to look over all the vessel's papers that had been brought to him, without giving outward sign he felt as he did, said a great deal for his character and firmness.

The papers seemed in order. There was a cargo manifest, several receipted bills, two letters from some New York agents to agents in Lisbon, a few other documents, among them a master's certificate made out to one Captain Dawson, qualifying him to proceed with a fore-and-aft rigged vessel of any tonnage into any ocean in the world. And yet, with all this, there was no proof that other than the general information given about the *Esmerald* was correct. Captain Hardy compressed his lips and, setting down the papers, fingered his pointed beard. His right hand he placed in his pocket again, to grip Mr. Lamont's gun.

"I presume you have a log book?" he inquired gravely.

The other man seemed confused, and then nodded.

"There was one, of course. The mate kept it and I haven't located it since he died."

Captain Hardy stared at him with a horrified curiosity, a sort of fascination such as one sometimes feels for something hideous and repulsive. The man was unbelievably naive in his statements, even child-like. He could know little or nothing about the sea. Putting on that uniform jacket hadn't made him a sailor. Possessing mental and physical powers above the average, he seemed weak on logic, unable to judge the effect of his words, of his story. Perhaps too desperate to care greatly.



CAPTAIN HARDY felt the other was baffled, even dangerously embayed, as a rat might be. There was a flicker of murderous impatience in the peculiar blue-green eyes, an instinctive tensing of the muscles. It was a question of what to do next. To continue with further question-

ing seemed useless, even puerile. To mention those significant things which had come to his notice, such as the cutlass and the man lying under the canvas on the poop, seemed unwise.

Dawson was young and strong, quick to move. Once convinced all hope of persuading and beguiling Captain Hardy was gone he would undoubtedly act. Desperate men do not care. The captain decided he had better dissemble. He would announce he was satisfied and would return to his own vessel to choose men he could place on board the *Esmerald*. He might get away peaceably then, and once upon the deck of his own vessel he could think more clearly, plan more fully. At present he had to admit himself deadlocked, even in particular danger. He was oppressed by the cabin's gloom, by the opalescent glints upon the table, by the mysterious creakings as the schooner rolled.

He cleared his throat, preparing to deliver himself, when from the closed room in which he had before heard those vagrant noises, there came a short, sharp cry of anger. This was followed by a dull thud, and a metallic jingling, as if something had fallen or had been hurled to the deck. Dawson whirled, quick as a flash, and his breath was sucked in with a harsh whistle. Captain Hardy turned his head and stared, for some reason his flesh creeping.

He had known there was some one, a woman in that closed cabin, but even so this sudden disturbance, coming at a time of tension, made him jump. He took a fresh grip on Mr. Lamont's gun, thrusting the papers on the table aside. Then the door of the closed room was flung abruptly open, to jar back against the bulkhead with a crash. There was a surge of vivid color that dyed the semi-gloom, and she appeared, vibrant and alive, illuminating the whole cabin and driving the shadows back.

Just what sort of woman Captain Hardy had been expecting to see he never knew. But whatever he had expected, all his previous conflicting emotions and fears

were wiped away on the instant he saw her. He had to start again, readjust himself to an entirely new condition. He was thunderstruck. For a moment he even forgot his adversary looming above him across the table, and was only reminded of his presence when the other spoke, his voice dry and hard.

"What are you doing here?"

He seemed unable to continue. Glancing quickly up at him Captain Hardy perceived a large vein had appeared down the center of his forehead, throbbing and alive. His whole face was congested, his nostrils white and quivering, drawn in. It was as if he were, literally, about to burst.

"He didn't lie to us!" cried the woman furiously.

She took no notice of what he said. Her breast was heaving, her eyes ablaze. She had one hand on her hip and the other held out before her, the fingers closed. She stared at Dawson for a fraction of a second and then, with a sweeping motion, she jerked her closed hand, opening the fingers and flinging across the table, behind the man, a shower of yellow metal counters. A few struck the farther bulkhead. A few rolled tinkling from the table to the floor. A few remained on the table, smooth bright things about the size of a quarter.

"There!" she ejaculated, panting.

Captain Hardy felt the brief silence grow hard. He felt Dawson tighten with a great breath and the petulant anger of the woman seemed to go through the whole cabin, making the captain uncomfortable.

"So you couldn't wait?" said Dawson at last, his voice flat. "You had to pry open his drawers."

She made a furious gesture, obviously beside herself.

"Does it matter?" she flung at him. "Look! They're not gold at all!"

Dawson stared at her for a long moment and then turned as if against his will, reluctantly, to gaze on the shining dark pool of the table. He bent over and picked up one of the counters, with a

movement that was almost delicate. He held the little object between his forefinger and thumb, gravely examining it. And then he bent the metal double and with a bitter laugh flung it aside.

"Brass!" he said. He breathed deeply, and with an air of weariness, almost of despair, he sank to a chair. He seemed then to remember Captain Hardy.

"Ah, Captain. My—wife."



THE woman had recovered some of her composure and was biting her lower lip, looking frowningly from Dawson to the other and back. Captain Hardy rose, removed his peaked cap and muttered something inaudible in his beard. And since the woman made no effort to sit, merely acknowledging him with a nod and a slow, speculative glance, he remained standing, his fingers tightening upon the weapon in his pocket.

The schooner rolled heavily, groaned all along her hull. There was the quick, hard drumming of a heavy rain squall upon the planking above, a vicious noise. It passed in a matter of seconds and the schooner steadied again. Captain Hardy surveyed the woman in silence, a trifle embarrassed.

She was quite young, certainly still in her early twenties. In height she was a few inches over five feet, more plump than slender, and her complexion was of that shade which might best be described as a pale coffee-and-cream in color; a quadroon unless Captain Hardy was mistaken, possibly an octoroon and certainly a woman of unusual beauty.

Her hair was a shiny blue-black, drawn smoothly back from her forehead, coiled and bunched low upon the nape of her neck and bringing out the more vividly a crimson shawl she had carelessly draped over remarkably fine shoulders. Her eyes were large, with that glistening, mellow darkness that is irresistibly fascinating to many men, filled with vibrant life and yet holding in their depths a hint of languor and smoldering passion. Her other features were regular and small; delicate

brows, finely chiseled nostrils, a ripe mouth half open to give a hint of shining teeth.

She wore some dress of a colored silk material, but of what exact shade Captain Hardy could never after remember or define. It merged with her background, that he knew; or perhaps she was so vivid she dominated all of her clothing save the crimson shawl. Whatever she wore it was loose upon her, almost slovenly, leaving her throat exposed in defiance of the convention of that time, but being filled out and even tight where it came across her breasts. Her arms were bare, ending in slender, tapering hands with rosy nails in which she evidently took a great pride. She wore jewelry; a few rings, a necklet of pink coral, gold circles in her ears. She looked outlandish, bizarre, and indescribably sensual.

It was this sensual aspect that impressed Captain Hardy as he finished his brief appraisal. There was, he thought, something vaguely reminiscent of the panther about her, something animal-like, definite even to the faint cloying odor of her body that permeated the main cabin above the scents of wood and rope and the sea, the same odor he had noticed when he had first descended the companion and had been unable to define.

Her full red lips, her soft chin, her melting eyes and full bosom were wholly in keeping with this animal magnetism; but her thin, curved brows, the delicate nostrils, a slight hollowness of the cheeks, the very high pose of her head gave an impression of aloof aristocracy. The combination of this calm hauteur with obvious passion was almost terrifyingly fascinating.

Captain Hardy felt helpless to cope with her, just as he was, at first, helpless to remove his eyes from her. She came closer toward him as he watched.

"Ah, Captain," she said. "I am Julia."

He saw her mood had changed, as rapidly as the face of the sea in squally time. Her voice was no longer shrill and petulant with anger, but rich, fruity, a little endowed with huskiness, so that it sent unbidden a vague but delightful irri-

tation along the seaman's nerves. He deliberately steeled himself against her and compressed his lips, bowing gravely. He did not speak to her. He addressed himself to Dawson. For the moment their personal matters seemed in abeyance.

"I was not aware you had your wife on board, sir."

Dawson was motionless, drooped in his chair, his hands resting listlessly on the table. The fire seemed to have ebbed from his eyes, his shoulders were bowed, his face drawn and haggard. He looked exhausted. He stared dully at the metal counters that spotted the glinting surface of the mahogany table.

"No," he said, with an effort. "I forgot to mention it." He paused for a moment and then stirred, straightening to look at the woman. "Are you mad?" he said hoarsely. "To show yourself like this—?" He gestured wearily as she lifted one shoulder in a querulous shrug. Her voice was bold, even insolent.

"What was there to do? What is there to do now? He told us the truth. There was no gold."

A little moving knot of muscles appeared side of Dawson's jaw.

"You talk too much," he said flatly. "Go to your room."



SHE laughed and instead of obeying him seated herself in the chair that stood empty between Dawson and Captain Hardy, resting her elbow on the table and placing her soft chin in the heel of her hand.

"I'm tired of this little ship," she declared, and stifled a yawn, simulated, the captain thought. She rearranged her shawl with her free hand and shrugged one shoulder again. "There is too much trouble. Won't you take me with you?"

This last was addressed to Captain Hardy, who was still standing, his cold blue eyes passing from one to the other. He fixed his gaze upon her as the meaning of her words sank home. He was startled, nonplused. Her eyes seemed to be draw-

ing him, drowning him; her teeth glistened as she smiled.

"Madame—" He was stammering, a slow redness creeping under his skin.

There was a crash as Dawson leaped to his feet with a bitter oath and brought his fist down upon the table. He leaned over her, his face ashen, and convulsed with a sudden, intense fury.

"You'll stay with me!" he choked. "Damn you! Sink or swim, you'll stay with me! You'll not treat me like the others!"

She did not wince. Captain Hardy was appalled by her coolness, by the faint disdain with which she turned her head and looked upward into the other's working face. Her voice was like ice.

"Don't be a fool!"

The great vein throbbed again in the man's congested forehead and his throat swelled. He tried to speak several times before the words came.

"I see enough. Can I help it if it's brass—not gold? Damn you!" He made a wide sweep with one hand across the table that brushed all the metal counters, the whisky bottle and the glasses tinkling and crashing to the deck. "You'll stay! I did it for you and you'll stay! That's all you wanted, wasn't it? You thought it was gold. I know you. I've known you all along. You never fooled me—" He wilted suddenly, his voice dying away, as if the cool, amused look in her eyes drained all life from him.

"No?" she said.

There was a small silence. The schooner rolled and groaned; the dreary rain whispered above; the water washed chuckling along the hull; the glints of opalescence shifted and moved across the dark pool of the table. Captain Hardy's light oilskin, hanging open, crinkled audibly as he moved. The woman's mood changed.

"Did I ask you to go mad!" she blazed shrilly. Her head was thrust forward, her bosom heaved. "Do you think I want to stay here now? You fool! You went too far! They'll hang you!"

Dawson stared at her, with a sort of horror stricken fascination, stunned, re-

treating a little. And in that moment, and for the first time, Captain Hardy felt a pity for the man. He seemed almost abject, as if this woman had but to demand it of him and he would grovel at her feet.

"You mean you'll leave me now?" he whispered, incredulous. "After—after this—"

She emanated contempt, shrugging again.

"Don't be a fool," she said coldly. "What is there to stay for? You can't take this ship anywhere by yourself, with only two men. You had to kill the mate—" That stirred him again.

"Shut up," he said, his voice metallic.

Something in his eyes, or perhaps in his tone, frightened her for a moment and she lost a little of her poise, drawing the crimson shawl closer about her shoulders. Captain Hardy forgot to breathe, bracing himself. He was appalled at her obvious contempt for the man, at her almost child-like folly, her naiveté in baiting him so, as if she had no idea she was dealing with an explosive force, or did not care. The captain was reminded of something primitively and unconsciously cruel, indifferent, like a chicken thoughtfully picking maggots from a rotten log; a spider fastening deliberately upon a fly; a man stepping casually upon an ant, leaving it crippled and dying.

Dawson looked at Captain Hardy, his blue-green eyes burning, the vein pulsing down his forehead.

"Stay where you are," he said.

It was more than a command; it was a definite threat. But Captain Hardy had no intention of moving or of attempting to flee from this shadow filled pit that creaked and rolled, with passions flaming and fading across its space. He was rooted where he stood, gripped by a force beyond control, intensely a part of the scene. Dawson leaned forward and took the woman's wrist in a savage grip. He shook her.

"Listen, Julia! I'm taking this ship to South America. I'll sell her there and you'll go away with me. Never mind the

gold we didn't get!" He laughed shortly. "There'll be enough. We'll make a run for it. I'm not going under without a fight."

"You're mad," she cried, trying to twist her arm free. "Let me go, you fool. Let me go!"



SHE half rose, struggling with him, furious and panting, striking at his face with her free hand so her rings left raw scratches down his cheeks. Some shaking barrier of control seemed to break down within him then. He released her with a rough push, gave a sudden leap sideways, picked up the sheathed cutlass that lay on the shadow dark settee and smashed it furiously down upon the table. He glared directly at Captain Hardy now, warding the woman's imprecations off with an arm that was taut as a bar of iron.

"You'll get off this vessel!" he grated through clenched teeth. "You and your man. Get off! I'll handle my own affairs. I didn't ask you to come on board. Now get off!"

"He's not going without me!" the woman raved. "You're mad! I won't stay with you. He's not going." She sank her teeth in his hand as he endeavored to hold her again, and then with a triumphant cry she darted back and to one side, panting and shrill. "You fool!" she shouted. "You fool!"

Captain Hardy retained his composure, although he was considerably shaken. The threat of actual and imminent danger stiffened him, as always, and his dignity and the subconscious knowledge that here, in this cabin, he represented for the moment the judgment and the conscience of man, enabled him to stand straight and grim. He picked his words with care, speaking deliberately above the hoarse sounds of heavy breathing while Dawson and the woman glared at each other.

"I fail to see of what use that would be to you, sir, for me to go—any more than it would be of use for you to attack me. I—or my first officer—will report this whole affair, whatever the exact details

may be. You will certainly be arrested in the first port you reach. And just as certainly you cannot handle a vessel of this size without aid."

The other turned upon him, snarling, his face blazing with passion, his eyes wildly determined.

"Yes, I can. I will! I've got two men locked in the galley out of your damned sight. I'll do it—if I sail her to hell! I'll take the chance. I've gone too far." He checked himself abruptly and his tone altered. He subsided to a deadly calm. "Go on deck, ahead of me."

Captain Hardy hesitated. He had never in his life deliberately shot a man, and the idea of doing so now somewhat shook him. He was still very much in the dark as to the exact crime or crimes this Dawson was guilty of, although he was convinced the matter warranted extreme measures. There was no doubt in his mind that the other would strike him with the cutlass if he protested or offered resistance. The man had remarked himself that he had gone too far. Too far for what? He had killed others. He would not hesitate now.

Captain Hardy gnawed at his lip and wondered if he could draw Mr. Lamont's revolver from his pocket, aim it and fire it in time to escape a serious injury, possibly death. He doubted it. Dawson was watching him with a fierce and menacing intentness, quivering with repressed eagerness, possessed in this crisis of an intuition as to his thoughts and able to ascertain his next move before it took place. Men in desperate straits achieve that keenness. Their senses become acutely tuned. Captain Hardy himself could almost read what passed through the other's head, mirrored in his distended blue-green eyes. It was the woman who broke the tension.

"You fool!" she taunted again.

Captain Hardy was amazed at her folly. Or was it sheer unflinching confidence that she could mold Dawson to her will, bend him and break him as she chose? Doubtless she had done so already, many times. Yet her defiance was sheer mad-

ness now. Dawson was insane, out of his head with desperation and anger. Her contempt was like a serrated whip flicked across his heart and brain. But the woman seemed unaware of it, or ignored it. She laughed, as if she would shrivel him to a whimpering thing by her very contempt.

"You fool!"

Captain Hardy knew she had gone too far even before she spoke that last time. He fell back half a pace, bracing himself. Dawson had turned on her, his face convulsed.

"You'll leave me now!" he screamed. "You'll leave me now!" He mouthed unprintable things. "Leave me like the rest!"

With one swift motion he drew the cutlass from its scabbard, flinging the latter across the room to crash against the bulkhead and thud to the deck. The steel made a little whickering noise as it came clear and the woman screamed, conscious at last. She turned to run and stumbled over one of the swivel chairs as the schooner rolled. Dawson slashed at her, his teeth grinding, foam on his lips, and the heavy blade swished across the air and thudded into the bulkhead not an inch above her head.

It was the splintering of the wood that brought Captain Hardy to sudden action, an action that was almost an automatic reflex of his muscular system. He jerked Mr. Lamont's revolver from his pocket, unaware he was doing so, and he pulled the trigger, the main cabin seeming to rock and shudder with the violent blast of the explosion. The woman screamed again.



IN THE very act of taking a step forward to wrench the cutlass out of the bulkhead, Dawson stopped and coughed. His hand fell away from the cutlass hilt, leaving the weapon still quivering. He coughed again, as if to clear his throat, stood swaying for a moment to the lift of the deck beneath him, and then with a faint moan he crumpled at the knees and sprawled with a thud against the woman,

bearing her down and pinning her to the white planking.

She clawed free, her nails scratching the wood, drawing herself from under the heavy body and uttering a scream after scream that shattered the very nerves and wilted the stomach. She half fell in a corner at last, to turn at bay, her hands at her throat, her face gray, her eyes distorted. Faint blue smoke wisped upward, eddied and swirled about the cabin. Captain Hardy repressed a ridiculous desire to sneeze.

He felt drawn inside, with a heavy weight in his bowels. He stared stupidly at the weapon he still held, and as if to get rid of it, away from his sight, he stuffed it hurriedly back into his pocket. He was aware that he was bathed in cold sweat and the dull, toneless screaming of the woman unnerved him. He stared at her blankly for a moment.

"Shut up!"

The words sounded muffled in his own ears, still ringing from the explosion, and he doubted at first if she heard him. But she stopped screaming abruptly, looked at him and grew calmer, adjusting her dress over her heaving bosom with shaking fingers. The *Esmerald* leaned over as a squall brisker than usual swept upon her. The thick rain drummed upon her decks above and Captain Hardy waited, as if listening, until it died away and he felt the schooner shudder to a more even keel.

He fingered his beard nervously and then rousing himself walked slowly round the table to stare down at the lifeless body of Dawson, the arms outspread, the head and neck twisted grotesquely. A vagrant beam of gloomy light fell upon the face, convulsed still, the teeth exposed, the eyes fixed and staring, drained of life indeed, exhausted by passions too deep and strong for the body to bear. The woman rose unsteadily, whimpering deep in her throat, and Captain Hardy looked at her as she came close to him, filled with a coldly growing anger. He hardly knew what to do.

"He wasn't your husband?" he said wearily, already aware of the answer.

She shot a quick look at him and then hastily shook her head. He stared at the corpse again and was motionless for a long time, reflective. What was it that could bring one so young to such an end, could divert him from happiness to anger and frustration. Women and gold? Some quirk locked in the folds of the brain? To guide a man from a tiny cradle to a death in the cabin of a schooner adrift in the wide Atlantic? Captain Hardy sighed and looked about for the woman again, to discover her adjusting her hair before a small mirror that hung beneath the steadily ticking ship's clock.

It gave him something of a turn to watch her. He was horrified and nauseated by what he had been compelled to do, but tragedy seemed to flow from her like water from steel, leaving her largely unaltered. It occurred to him she must be supremely selfish, unable to fasten any real part of her emotions upon another. She must be self-contained, as if she were the axis around which all the world revolved; aloof, disdainful, indifferent. Not with the indifference of the gods, who understand, but with the indifference of a child who plucks the wings from a moth curiously to watch it stumble upon unfamiliar legs, wincing. Perhaps all women were that way, in a degree. The maternal cruelty, ruthlessness.

Captain Hardy was disturbed in his brief reverie by a sudden hail, followed by the heavy noise of shoes reluctantly descending the companion from the poop. And then the boatswain of the *Randolph Perry* appeared, his honest red face pale and alarmed, his short fluffy side whiskers disturbed, one cheek bulging with a forgotten quid while in one hand he hefted a belaying pin he must have just plucked from the rail.

"You there, sir? All right, sir?" He halted halfway down the companion, blinking fearfully through the murk, and snatching sight of Captain Hardy's beard, jutting stiffly forth he drew a deep breath. "Ah," he muttered. "I thought I heard something, sir."

The breath of the outer air he brought

with him, muggy though it was; the wisp of the sea; the odor of sweat; the sound of his hoarse voice; the sight of his burly, good natured frame seemed to restore the balance in the cabin and in Captain Hardy. Here was something robust and honest, rough and without guile. Something natural and human, like a draught of cold spring water after a drink of a hot, muddy stream.

"Yes, I'm all right," said the captain gratefully. "I think I'll go on deck."



HE MOVED toward the steps, stumbling a little. He felt the need of fresh air, of the open sky and the sea; the touch of the boatswain's rough hand. He felt sick and shaken, weak in all his limbs. The reaction had set in. He had killed a man. He was stifled. The boatswain withdrew to the poop, awe stricken and numbed. He had caught a glimpse of the body sprawled near the table and the reek of burned powder had assailed his nostrils. The woman touched Captain Hardy's arm as he passed her, momentarily halting him. He stared at her, his cold eyes clouded by shadows beneath his gray brows, his very attitude giving a sense of repulsion and disapproval. He had himself in hand however, the training and beliefs of years still outwardly mastering his emotions and impulses.

"Very well," he said, with a quiet gravity, not waiting for her to speak. "Very well, I will take you with me." He felt her fingers press against his sleeve with a subtle gesture that horrified him, made him shudder inwardly. It was as if she had openly caressed him. He couldn't mistake her meaning. Her eyes were brooding now, and speculative. He had an idea she smiled faintly even as he turned his face from her. "You'd better get your things ready," he said unsteadily, and he shook her hand away and groped up the companion.

Once on deck he drew a deep breath, glanced mechanically to windward and aloft, as befitted a master of the craft, and then leaned uncertainly against the side

of the wet scuttle, the drizzle misting upon his beard. He was getting old, he felt, very tired of life. It seemed to loom over him with the leaden sky and the dull sea, almost overwhelming him. It was too much. There were too many problems. Justice stood still. There were so many things beyond the mind of man to understand, to grasp, to deal with. He lifted his worn face to the warm, stickiness of the rain, grateful for it, grateful for the gray-green monotony of the surging sea. He felt alone in all the world, a tiny mite of consciousness battered by forces beyond his control.

There was the *Randolph Perry* standing off in the misty distance and patiently awaiting him. He seemed to have come from a different world to view her again. He seemed to have been gone for ages, yet in actual time, he knew, it could not have been much more than half an hour he had been below in the main cabin. Time! Such a matter of perspective and mood. You could die a thousand deaths in one second and yet find an hour incredibly short, like a flash. It was all baffling.

Captain Hardy drew a handkerchief from his pocket and slowly wiped his forehead. He was exhausted, drained of all vitality. The sudden and startled exclamation which the boatswain gave just then was not even enough to disturb him. He heard the sound. He saw the boatswain, in plain view of him, open his mouth and gape; saw his eyes distend. Yet it was a full second before Captain Hardy turned to view this next phenomenon, this next surprise the *Esmerald* might have in store for him.

A man stood against the rail, across the poop. A tall man, somewhat bony and gaunt, with a bald shiny head encircled with a fringe of white hair. There was blood down one side of his face, dyeing half of his heavy white mustache. His gray flannel shirt was stained and torn, and he stood swaying weakly with the motion of the ship, a hand upon the rail to steady himself, his head nodding uncertainly as if he felt sleepy.

"Well," said Captain Hardy wearily.

He had reached a mental condition where he was almost beyond the reach of any further shock. Too much had happened. He would hardly have been surprised had the deck opened up and a tree flowered forth; if the archangel Gabriel had appeared before him with his trumpet. The edge had been taken from his faculties. This new development he accepted as normal, as quite a matter of course, almost indifferent to it.

He stared across the poop for some time, still wiping the perspiration from his forehead and considering the matter. He remembered the pile of wet canvas he had perceived wedged in the scuppers as he had gone below that time with Dawson; canvas from which had protruded the fingers of a hand and a red edging that might have been blood, or the fringe of an ensign. This man could only have come from there, he decided dully. The mate, of course. Then filled with a queer indifferent curiosity, as if he wished to know, but was still not particular as to whether he knew or not, he straightened his body from the wet scuttle and moved across the poop to inspect the canvas. It was flat now, flung back into a smaller heap, and where it had once been there was a small American ensign, sodden and crumpled as if a heavy body had lain upon it. Somehow he was grateful it was not blood.

The gaunt man against the rail lifted a haggard face and stared at Captain Hardy, hardly comprehending him because of a dazed mist that fogged his eyes and his brain. He lifted an arm and ran a shaking, gnarled hand across his mouth, as if to wipe away the sticky blood that clotted in one corner beneath his flowing white mustache. There was, the captain perceived, an ugly wound in his skull, almost a hole from which the blood slowly welled.

"Ah," said Captain Hardy mechanically. "You're the mate."

The other man closed his eyes and after a brief pause opened them again. The dazedness passed. He considered the captain soberly.

"The mate?" He wiped his mouth again. "That's right, sir, my name's Manochie."



THERE was another pause. Captain Hardy saw the mate was much older than he had appeared at first glance. His cheeks were cavernous, the skin wrinkled and brown as the shell of dried walnut, but tight and shiny over the cheekbones. Over a once massive chest caved the ruin of once broad shoulders, and there was that about his very frame, about his faded blue eyes, bony wrists, wrinkled throat, an impression of unutterable weariness, of experiences too deep and full for the complete telling and understanding. He leaned back against the rail, his face uplifted to the warm rain, a hand awkwardly and abstractedly rubbing the loose wattles of his throat. A mere wreck of a man.

"I think you'd better sit down," said Captain Hardy seriously. "There's the skylight."

He motioned to his boatswain and between them they assisted the mate to the skylight where he dropped heavily down to rest, giving a gusty sigh and placing his elbows on his bony knees to hold his shiny bald head between his palms. He was very sick. Captain Hardy doubted if he would recover from the blow that had crushed his skull, though he might live for some time and seemed endowed with a vitality like that of a stubborn, storm shattered oak.

"You'd better find some whisky," advised the captain, and with considerable reluctance and an obvious distaste for the task the boatswain backed away and, turning, groped down the companion to the main cabin.

Captain Hardy remained motionless, fingering his pointed beard and frowning down upon the mate's bowed head. There was nothing to say. The man would explain in time. The boatswain returned with a freshly opened bottle of whisky and a thick china mug into which he poured a substantial amount of the

amber fluid. The mate had to be roused from his bent posture by several compassionate shakes and muttered admonitions to "Take a drop!" before he was able to grasp the mug.

The bite of the spirit made him cough at first, but then he swallowed satisfyingly, held out the mug for more and swallowed that too. He breathed hard and the boatswain, noticing the captain's back was turned, hurriedly stopped himself a generous drink and downed it, all in one motion, and without taking the trouble to dispose of the quid in his cheek.

"I suppose you've had a good deal of trouble," said Captain Hardy at last.

The other man stared at him, a faint flush crawling beneath his withered cheeks as the liquor took hold. His eyes cleared. He placed his hands upon his knees, leaned forward until his weight was upon them and coughed distressingly for some time, bringing up blood.

"When did it happen?" asked the captain at last, wiping his beard.

The mate finished coughing and stared at the wet deck for a while. And then seeming endowed with a sudden surge of strength he gazed brusquely upward.

"This morning, sir. Early this morning."

Captain Hardy was profoundly surprised. As early as this morning! It was hardly noon yet. He remembered the sharks alongside, the slashed rail, the fresh blood on the cutlass. Yes, he could believe it; as early as that morning. Extraordinary! The peculiar vagaries of fate! Had the *Randolph Perry* lifted across that gray-green sea an hour sooner, half an hour, perhaps . . .

Hardy muttered in his beard and shook his head. It was all bewildering and depressing. The sticky rain trickled into the collar of his jacket. The leaden sky seemed to frown upon him, beat him down. He staggered a little as a squall came with a gust of cooler air, with a heavy patter of rain. The freshet of wind whined in the rigging, slatted the canvas. No one spoke until it had passed, the noise and the rain, the livelier

movements of the ship; until the warm drizzle had patiently resumed again.

And then in brief mutters and with wandering words, interrupted by squalls and the banging of cabin doors from down below where the woman made ready, Captain Hardy was given a story, which, pieced together with what he already knew and what he later found in the log book, and with what he surmised and judged, made up the following remarkable narrative, set down here in a somewhat extended form but holding strictly to the facts as Captain Hardy entered them in his official report to the consul at Dakar, French Senegal.

II

ON THE 22nd of February, in that same year of 1905, the three masted schooner *Esmerald* left the harbor of New York with a cargo of grain alcohol, consigned to Lisbon, Portugal, where it was to be used in the fortifying of wines. A crew of exactly twelve men manned the vessel, all except three of them strangers to one another, a fact not remarkable for an ocean going vessel that signed a new complement with the beginning of every voyage.

The three men who were acquainted with one another were the captain, Charles Dawson; the mate, Robert Manochie, who had sailed with Captain Dawson before; and the captain's younger brother, Harry Dawson, who occupied a newly created berth as supercargo. Apart from these men there was a second mate named John Sanders, a youngster not yet out of his teens, making his first voyage as an officer. There were also a mulatto cook named Fordley; a negro steward named Maxwell; a halfcaste Spanish seaman named Juan, and five white seamen of varying ages and nationalities, named respectively Carraway, Brown, Carlsen, Bodley and Samuel Hand, the last being a man well along in years and with considerable experience on schooners, for which reason he acted as boatswain.

There was, to all outward appearances, nothing about the *Esmerald* or her crew, as she cleared New York harbor, to show that this voyage was to be any different from the many others she had made. And for a short while nothing unusual developed.

The first blow that ill fortune struck at the vessel was as she cleared Cape Hatteras, driving through a heavy gale that took the headsails out of her and carried away one of the white sailors, the man named Carraway. As there was a bad sea running at the time, and the schooner was herself in some danger, no attempt was made to lower a boat to rescue the unfortunate man who, laden as he was with seaboots and oilskins, undoubtedly sank like a stone.

The day the *Esmerald* ran out of the gale and entered milder weather, it developed there was considerable ill feeling existing between Captain Dawson and his younger brother Harry, a matter apparently having its origin in the recent death of their father. The old gentleman, it seemed, had been so unwise as to leave the major portion of his estate to his elder son, enabling him to buy a substantial interest in the *Esmerald*, which vessel he had already commanded for a number of years.

To offset his brother's feelings about the matter, and being somewhat of a genial and peaceful man, Captain Dawson had given him his present berth, which, as the vessel had never before had occasion to carry a supercargo, was little short of a sinecure.

This friendly gesture, however, in no way seemed to allay the rankling discontent with which the other was consumed, a discontent that found audible expression in quarreling with the captain on every possible occasion, ostensibly because it was necessary for the younger Dawson to berth midships instead of aft with the officers. Here he felt he belonged, although he knew the accommodations were cramped as it was.

Manochie, the mate, did not think very much would have come of this bad feeling

between the brothers had not another incident occurred, and one that was destined to have disastrous effects upon the whole ship. The day after they had passed Hatteras the watch on deck was astonished by the sight of a woman issuing from the cabin of the mulatto cook Fordley, who berthed midships near his galley. This woman, apparently quite unconcerned, walked about for some time, in spite of Fordley's shrill voiced expostulations that she would get him into trouble, until Captain Dawson noticed her from the poop and immediately sent for her. That he was immediately fascinated there can be no doubt, since he insisted that hereafter she was to eat in the main cabin with the officers. He would have given her Sanders' own room for her quarters had not the young second mate strenuously objected, in which objection he might have been overruled had not the captain, much to his mingled astonishment, amusement and chagrin, discovered the woman to be the wife of the mulatto cook Fordley.

Questioning this man, he further learned that he had married his wife some years before, when she had been but a child, taking her much against his will in payment for a debt owed to him by an uncle who was sheltering her, her parents being dead. He had not seen her much, save at intervals between his voyages, but as time passed and she developed he became fond of her, a fondness which was obviously not returned. In fact, he confessed to Captain Dawson, she had expressed for him every other emotion but that of fondness, and constantly resented the fact she was his wife.

He had not complained so much of that, he stated, being somewhat in awe of her and proud of her, but returning one voyage he found reasons to suspect her faithfulness, which, the suspicion being confirmed, made him furiously angry, so much so that when he had joined the *Esmerald* he had insisted that she come with him. He admitted he had been drunk at the time or he would not have thought of such a thing, but it had seemed

to him that he could hide her in his room with reasonable safety and so enjoy her company on the long voyage.

She had protested, of course, but he had overcome her by force and with a curious drunken determination had smuggled her on board late at night, before the schooner sailed.



THE first few days at sea she had seemed docile enough, possibly because she was sick with the unfamiliar motion of the vessel. But once she had recovered from this indisposition she had grown restless and petulant. Fordley had, he admitted, very little control over her, except during such times as he was under the influence of liquor and used her forcibly, but he had pleaded with her and urged her to remain hidden through fear for himself. He had, naturally, not been at all certain how the captain would receive the news that he had brought his wife along. Against her open defiance, however, he had been helpless, and she had calmly walked out of his cabin with a cynical unconcern that staggered him for all his knowledge of her. He was frightened and immediately apprehensive.

Captain Dawson received this story with mixed feelings, of which finally amusement predominated. He had undoubtedly contemplated the enjoyment of such a vividly interesting woman himself, but being a reasonably fair man and possessed of a considerable sense of humor, according to Manochie, he at first gave up the idea as impossible with her husband on board. Knowing, however, that Fordley was badly frightened at what he had done in smuggling her on the ship and unquestionably expected some punishment for the act, the captain insisted that his wife eat aft with him to brighten his table at mealtimes, on the pretense that it was, after all, scarcely fitting for a lady to be kept confined to a small and stuffy cabin midships.

To this Fordley readily and with some relief agreed, and the woman thereafter spent considerably more time on the poop

than she did on the main deck where her husband lived and worked.

This, however, was not the end of the matter, for Julia Fordley proved to be an incurable coquette. She did not apparently care very much for the captain at first. He was a big man, red faced and genial, with a boisterous laugh and heavy black mustache, and somewhat coarse. But there were others about, and the days were idle and long. She had, as Manochie pointed out, nothing else to do.

Her wandering interest first settled itself upon young Sanders, the second mate, who was plainly frightened of her. Not more than nineteen, he was a tall, serious boy, somewhat thin and bony, with a mop of red hair and a round freckled face, having a firm belief in sea discipline and very conscious of being in his first position as an officer. He had had very little to do with women, was shy about them, and knowing also, as Manochie observed, that Captain Dawson was not any too pleased at the preference shown him, young Sanders took every opportunity to escape when Mrs. Fordley came near to him. After a short while she gave him up.

Her attention was next engaged by two more mature men, one of them being Harry Dawson and the other a white seaman, Carlsen, a young giant of a Scandinavian with blond hair and a slow, humorous manner of talking. Dawson, at this stage of the voyage, was somewhat sulky, brooding over his fancied wrongs and quarreling with his brother, and except for a few times when he chanced to meet Mrs. Fordley on the main deck and she cornered him he did not pay her much attention.

Possibly in petulance or anger at her two rebuffs, from young Sanders and from Dawson, she immediately entered into a more serious intrigue with Carlsen, who was madly infatuated from the first. They took to meeting after dark, in the shadows on the main deck, near the break of the poop. Manochie observed that he found them together one night when he went midships for something, and he promptly ordered Carlsen forward. The

man refused to go and Manochie, being of the old school of officers, struck him with a belying pin, laying him senseless on the deck.

This was reported by Mrs. Fordley to Captain Dawson who, refusing to listen to the mate's side of the matter, severely reprimanded him, a fact which started in the aged mate a strong resentment against the woman, which resentment, he admitted, she cordially returned, taking every opportunity to inflame the captain against him.

Practically every man on board the schooner by this time seemed fully aware of the intrigue between Carlsen and the woman, except Fordley himself, and possibly Captain Dawson whose position precluded gossip from reaching him. The climax came however, with shocking suddenness, about a week after the *Esmerald* had left New York.

Fordley had gone forward one night after finishing his work in the galley, to play cards with the sailors in the fore-castle. It appeared there must have been liquor at this party, several gallons of alcohol that had been filched from the cargo without the knowledge of the ship's officers. At any rate Fordley had returned to his room somewhat earlier than expected, and also somewhat more than drunk.

Pausing outside the door he had heard Carlsen's voice and that of his wife. The infuriated mulatto then, inflamed by the alcohol and a sense of wrong, went into his galley, secured a meat cleaver and, bursting open the cabin door, struck Carlsen across the base of the neck, killing him instantly and almost severing his head from his body. Carlsen never had a chance; the cook was on him before he could turn.

Mrs. Fordley ran aft, screaming and half dressed and, breaking into Captain Dawson's room, flung herself upon him with incoherent cries, asking him to protect her. Manochie heard her through the open skylight of the main cabin, as he was on the poop, considerably disturbed by the screaming.



THE captain got up at once. He had been reading in his bunk and was undressed, but putting on some clothes and securing a lantern and his revolvers, he went midships to investigate with his two mates in support. Carlsen was stretched in a pool of blood upon the deck of the cook's room, and Fordley, totally unnerved now, was crouched beside the body, whimpering. The captain dragged the mulatto aft to his own room, and dismissing the startled Manochie and the horrified Sanders, he held a private conference with Fordley and his wife.

Exactly what transpired at this interview may not be known, but it must have been a curious and even cold blooded business. Whatever it was, a most extraordinary agreement seemed to be reached. The captain must have been aware that he now had complete control over the mulatto, and the mulatto must have known it too. In any event the cook went back to his galley. Carlsen was buried. Mrs. Fordley remained aft, in the captain's room, apparently with the grateful acquiescence of her thoroughly unnerved husband. Manochie expressed his complete disapproval with one curt remark.

The situation, however, lasted for several days, until Mrs. Fordley, apparently recovering her confidence and composure and obviously with no great respect for Captain Dawson, began to cast about again for further adventures. About this time, explained Manochie, there was a rumor that ran through the ship, commencing probably with Maxwell, the white haired negro steward, that in the captain's room, in one of his locked drawers, there were several bags of gold coins. The seamen forward discussed this; Manochie and young Sanders discussed it aft, somewhat surprised because it was the first they had heard of any bulion being on board the vessel. Mrs. Fordley heard the rumor while she was at breakfast one morning with the captain and Manochie.

Harry Dawson came below, obviously angry, his face dark and sullen. The cap-

tain looked at him and asked him what he wanted, at which he said he had heard there was a considerable amount of gold in his room. Captain Dawson laughed, at which his brother went on to say he supposed that was more of the old man's, their father's, estate, and he ought to have some share of it anyway. The captain told him not to be a fool. He didn't know how such a tale had got around but all he had in his room were a few bags of brass disks which he was taking to a friend of his on the West African coast, where they were bound after leaving Lisbon. The friend wanted them for trading with the natives, he explained.

The younger Dawson laughed, frankly disbelieving such a tale, at which the captain grew angry and when the other demanded to see the disks refused to show them to him, stating that his word was sufficient and if the other didn't like it he could go to hell. Harry Dawson left the main cabin in a rage and, strangely enough, no one on board believed the captain. It seemed obvious that he would deny there was any gold on the ship.

Mrs. Fordley, according to Manochie, tried to persuade the captain to show the disks to her but he gruffly refused, and telling her he didn't want to hear such nonsense again, went abruptly up on deck. The woman, said Manochie, was very thoughtful as she finished her meal and once asked him, the mate, if he had any duplicate keys to the cabin, which he hadn't. He thought, personally, that the matter had ended there, until one night he came unexpectedly upon young Dawson and Mrs. Fordley talking in low voices near the break of the poop, almost in the exact spot where a few days before he had surprised Mrs. Fordley and young Carlsen.

He confessed that he listened, though the wind made hearing difficult.

From what he gathered the woman had learned the reason for the dislike and enmity between the brothers and was speaking to Harry Dawson about the gold, apparently sympathizing. Dawson replied with a passionate protestation of

affection and kissed her, which gave the mate reasons to believe they had progressed upon an affair farther than he or any one else had suspected. He did not feel, he explained seriously, that it was his duty to inform the captain, especially as he still rankled under the reprimand he had received for striking Carlsen and had no liking whatever for Mrs. Fordley, who had informed on him.

The same night Manochie discovered young Dawson and Mrs. Fordley together, a serious fight took place in the forecabin, over what exactly it was never discovered but probably due to liquor. One man, Bodley, a white seaman, was knifed so badly he died before dawn and was buried the following noon. As the men were dismissing after the burial, and after Captain Dawson, his brother and Mrs. Fordley had disappeared below, apparently for a drink, the oldest seaman, Samuel Hand, who was acting boatswain, approached Manochie with a worried expression.



HE INFORMED the mate the men had been broaching cargo again and had been drunk when the fight started.

Further, he assured Manochie that he would not be responsible for what might happen next, with the men able to imbibe freely and a story current to the effect there was a considerable amount of gold in the captain's room. He was considerably disturbed, fearing more bloodshed. Manochie promised he would look into the matter, and assured Hand there was no such gold, a statement which the old seaman frankly disbelieved but seemed momentarily content with. The *Esmerald* was now three hands short and Manochie was becoming considerably worried himself, with the voyage not yet half finished as the vessel had been delayed by head winds and calms.

All this, the fight among the seamen, the discovery of Mrs. Fordley and young Dawson involved in an intrigue, Samuel Hand's caution to Manochie took place, said the mate, on the night of the 14th of

March, a little south of the 18th parallel.

The following day brought another major mishap. It was discovered, along toward noon, that the crew was drunk again and a search of the forecabin by the now considerably alarmed captain and the two mates failed to disclose where the broached alcohol was hidden. As the captain passed the galley, on his way aft, the cook, Fordley, who was staggering drunk, ran out brandishing the same meat cleaver with which he had killed Carlsen and shouting that he wanted his wife back. He struck Captain Dawson once, in the right arm, crippling it severely and the captain, hastily transferring his gun to his sound hand, shot the cook through the heart.

After this, Manochie explained, he was thoroughly frightened and he held a long conference with the young second mate, Sanders, and with Samuel Hand, who seemed to remain more sober than the rest and to have some sense of honesty and duty. It was Hand's belief that if the liquor could be held from the men the trouble would stop, but Sanders, while agreeing the liquor was a problem, very hotly declared that it was Mrs. Fordley who was causing most of the bloodshed, and in this Manochie concurred.

The woman appeared to have no sense of proportion at all, the mate explained, no knowledge of the passions she was deliberately creating in the men. Or perhaps she did not care. Whatever happened, she seemed to feel she would be safe, and from scraps of conversation that dropped from her now and then, in Manochie's hearing, he gathered she was consumed with a desire for the supposed gold, as well as with a growing and definite passion for young Dawson himself.

Manochie felt the situation to be so grave he accosted the woman very early on the morning of March 16th, as she came on the poop for a breath of air after breakfast. It was, he said, one of the most embarrassing moments in his life. He reminded her of the deaths that had already occurred and informed her that the schooner was already imperiled by the

lack of hands. He asked her then if she wouldn't do her utmost to avert more trouble, but she did not seem to comprehend the situation at all. She laughed at him at first, and when he insisted that his advice was sound she grew angry. She astonished him, he observed. He wondered if she were altogether sane. She told him it was none of his business as to what occurred on the ship, that she would do as she pleased, that she couldn't help it if men loved her and quarreled about her.

Finally at mention of the mythical gold she remarked, somewhat significantly, that she had no idea of spending the rest of her life in poverty and among a lot of sailors. She thoroughly frightened Manochie. He really believed she was capable of killing him herself if he interfered with any of her plans. He was astonished anew at her boldness. He was certain after this, he said, that she was not quite right in the head.

His fear of her, however, was not great enough to prevent him from speaking to Captain Dawson about the matter. The captain himself was beginning to realize that things had reached a serious stage, his mood probably engendered by the fact he had been severely hurt in the upper right arm by the late cook's cleaver. Then, as it happened this morning he was reasonably sober for the first time in some days. He had got into the habit of drinking heavily in company with Mrs. Fordley, who seemed like a wild woman when under the influence of alcohol, unable to control herself.

There was, apparently, a very warm interview between Dawson and Manochie on that early morning of the 16th of March, after the mate had talked with the woman. The captain somewhat sullenly agreed that matters had gone too far. Manochie was forcible, and even blunt about things, considering his own life as well as the lives of others were now endangered. It was a very serious matter. He said that he and the second mate had agreed that unless things were changed they would take the ship over themselves

and install some measure of discipline and reason.

Captain Dawson did not like such talk, but being badly wounded and apparently conscious himself of the justness of the mate's words, he agreed to take matters seriously in hand, even going so far as to promise to lock up all the liquor aft and give Manochie the key. He further agreed to order his brother to keep off the poop and to compel Mrs. Fordley to remain upon it. He planned another search of the forecastle, to locate the liquor, and threatened to put in irons any man found drunk thereafter; a somewhat futile gesture for they could not spare a man from the working of the ship.

With this, however, the mate was compelled to be content, and he was somewhat gratified to hear both Mrs. Fordley and the younger Dawson receive their orders to remain on their own decks.



AT THREE bells, nine-thirty that same morning, matters came to a head. The weather was as the *Randolph Perry* had found it, muggy, sticky, with a leaden sky, a sullen sea, a constant wearing drizzle interspersed with dark squalls of thicker rain. Manochie had the poop. Young Sanders was below in his room. Captain Dawson, filled with zeal now, had gone midships to speak to the negro steward, now the cook, as he had taken Fordley's vacant place and the food that morning had been almost unfit to eat, burned and filled with cockroaches. The captain had no sooner disappeared in the galley than young Dawson had come aft and ascended the companion to the poop.

Manochie explained he had remonstrated with the man, had stopped him, reminding him the captain had issued orders he was to remain on the main deck, but the other, obviously half drunk and furiously angry, knocked the mate down and stepped over his recumbent form. Manochie was not certain what he should do then. He was incapable, he observed, because of his age and infirmities, of forcibly ejecting young Dawson, and he did

not care to call the remaining seamen aft, so he finally determined to await the captain's return and let him handle the matter.

This occurred about fifteen minutes later. The captain came aft from the galley and Manochie immediately acquainted him with what had transpired. Remarking with considerable anger that he would show his brother once and for all who was master of the vessel, Captain Dawson then descended to the main cabin with the mate at his heels. His own door was open, hooked back, and as he and Manochie stepped clear of the companion they both saw young Dawson with his arms around Mrs. Fordley.

Captain Dawson did not move for some time, said the mate. While he must have previously suspected some sympathy between his brother and the woman he could not have known things had gone as far as this. Manochie did not think he was particularly angry, even now. Perhaps he was sated. He was certainly annoyed however, possibly with injured pride, possibly because it was his brother involved who had already defied his orders by coming on the poop at all. In any event he walked quietly forward and stood in the doorway of the room, speaking in a calm voice, remarking that first it had been the cook, then Carlsen, then himself, and now, apparently, his brother.

At his first words both the man and the woman grew deathly still and quiet. Then young Dawson lifted a flushed face and released the woman, who straightened and began to adjust her hair, though from her eyes she was frightened. The captain went farther into the cabin. He inquired, said Manochie, if he was supposed to die like the other now that Julia had found some one else.

His brother walked up to him and laughed. What was the captain going to do about it? He was shaking with angry mortification at having been discovered. He wanted to know, sneeringly, why he couldn't have the woman since the captain had the gold. In any case, he declared savagely, he was sick of seeing

everything go to the other all the time, and he didn't intend to stand for it any more. Captain Dawson, although he had his right arm in a sling, swore harshly and knocked him down.

Just what happened then Manochie was not quite sure. He was frightened and somewhat confused. Acutely conscious as he explained, of his age and infirmities, he stood helpless, rooted to the spot with horror. Twenty years before, ten years before, he insisted, he would have acted. But that time was past. Young Dawson got to his feet and, swearing thickly, wrenched from the bulkhead of the room an old cutlass the captain kept suspended from two large nails, a memento of his youth which he had spent in the Pacific as a sandalwood buyer and general trader.

Whipping the blade of this weapon clear, young Dawson sprang toward the captain, who flung up his sound arm with a hoarse cry of terror. He had no time for more. The cutlass fell with a chopping noise and the stricken man reeled backward, toppled over the low step of the room, and fell heavily to the deck almost at the mate's feet, his skull split open. Mrs. Fordley laughed, a hysterical sound, and Manochie soberly declared it was the most horrible thing he had ever heard in his life.

He shouted then, he said, calling to the second mate that the captain was being murdered, and young Sanders, who had not yet turned in, came out of his room and rushed toward the captain's door. Dawson stepped out at that moment, his breath coming in great gasps, his eyes insane, and without waiting for Sanders to attack him sprang at him and killed him with a sharp blow where the neck joined the body. Sanders must have died without comprehending in the least what it was all about.

Manochie fled, stumbling up the companion and falling on the rain-wet poop, shouting for Samuel Hand and the others. He remembered that, as he remembered hearing Dawson coming up the steps behind him, and overcome with

terror he ran aft and crouched foolishly behind the main cabin skylight. The action, however, probably saved his life.



SAMUEL HAND and Brown, the remaining white seamen, who were on deck most of the time now they were so short of men, came running aft at the mate's cries, to be joined by the cook as they passed the galley. They came up the lee companion, unsuspecting what was going on but thoroughly alarmed. The half-caste Spaniard, Juan, was at the wheel and had no part in what followed.

Dawson appeared on the poop, the cutlass still in his hand. And apparently quite out of his head with the lust to slaughter and with the liquor that fired his veins, he ran directly at the approaching men. Caught unawares, Brown was run through and fell back down the companion with blood running from his stomach. Samuel Hand, who had been behind him, turned and fled along the deck with Dawson in pursuit. The negro cook was already in flight, bolting into his galley where he was later joined by Juan who, deserting the wheel at the terrible cries that rang through the ship, and scared thoroughly out of his wits by the sight of the groaning Brown at the foot of the companion, scuttled midships as fast as he could go. Once in the galley with the cook he promptly shut and barred the doors.

Samuel Hand, fleeing for his life, slipped and fell on the wet deck midships, near the scupper, just as Dawson caught up with him. The cutlass slashed the wooden rail, was wrenched clear and fell again, almost in the same place. Hand rose, twisted about and backed off, crying out for mercy and with his arms uplifted to fend off the blows. Dawson slashed at him again, almost lopping one arm off, and then finished him with a vicious cut across the ear that bit deep into the brain.

That accomplished and now exhausted, his initial passion spent, young Dawson looked around and ran his shirt sleeve

across his forehead. Manochie explained he saw all this because sheerly from instinct he had left his position abaft the cabin skylight and had seized the wheel which Juan had deserted. He remained there, his teeth chattering with terror, his knees almost giving way under him. He was, he said earnestly, very much afraid.

He saw Dawson stoop, drag Hand upright and topple him over the rail. Then coming aft, the cutlass still swinging in his hand, he performed the same office for Brown, who was not yet dead and who cried out all the time he was being moved, until the water closed over him. Manochie did not know there were sharks to dispose of the bodies. He did not look overside.

Ascending to the poop, Dawson approached the mate, who was by now so thoroughly unnerved, he confessed, he could not have run if he had tried. He thought his last hour had come and tried to muster enough courage to meet the cutlass stroke with open eyes. It was a terrible moment. But Dawson did not strike him. He stood breathing hard, his face the face of a devil, and at last he explained that he intended to let Manochie live because he didn't understand navigation himself and he would need somebody to take the ship to some port.

The art of navigation has saved countless officers from the consequences of mutiny. Dawson declared that now his brother was dead the schooner was rightfully his, and if Manochie kept his mouth shut and helped him, he could be master of her for as long as she sailed. They could make up some story, he was sure. Something satisfactory to the authorities.

Manochie was so relieved at the time he immediately agreed, though not without some misgivings which, he observed, grew stronger as he became convinced he was only temporarily safe. He doubted if he would be allowed to live once the vessel was in sight of land. Dawson told him to lash the wheel then and to come below and help him bring the captain's body on deck, and that of

young Sanders. This was done, the bodies thrown overside and the worst of the blood disposed of. The time was now four bells, ten o'clock in the morning. It had all happened with astonishing swiftness. The *Esmerald* was hove to, her wheel lashed, and all but unmanned.

Mrs. Fordley had gone on deck, out of the way while the men cleared the main cabin and put things in order, and it was she who first saw the lofty spars of the *Randolph Perry* lifting above the rain mist that obscured the horizon. Her startled cry brought both Dawson and Manochie to the poop and for a while there was considerable confusion. Dawson was thunderstruck, utterly nonplused. They had not seen a vessel since leaving New York and now, at this very moment, so vitally important to him, without even a story yet concocted, with the blood of his victims still upon his hands and clothes, there was a large ship bearing almost directly down on him. Manochie's emotions were, of course, vastly different.

Dawson moved at last, however, with a desperate resolution, gripping the mate by the throat and shaking him furiously. He threatened he would kill him at the first move he made to attract attention, and ordered him to get to the wheel, forgetting it would be impossible to put the schooner before the wind again without help on deck. Manochie did not protest, he said. He was beyond all that. He went aft and took the lashings from the wheel as ordered, filled with dread and yet hoping succor would come.

Dawson ordered Julia Fordley below, telling her to go into the captain's room and remain there whatever happened. She said something about looking for the gold, so the mate explained, but Dawson savagely ordered her to let that wait. This was vital, a question of life and death. The gold did not matter. So Mrs. Fordley went below, a trifle angry, the mate judged, as if she did not like Dawson's tone. She seemed, even then, totally oblivious to their danger, and totally indifferent to what had happened.

She seemed mainly concerned about the money.

Dawson ran midships, hammered on the galley door until he was answered, and then threatened to kill both Juan and Maxwell if they so much as uttered a sound, or gave any sign of their existence. Assured he had them thoroughly cowed he came aft again and went below to wash himself and change his clothes, on the off-chance the strange vessel would come close enough to them to see them. His last threat was directed toward Manochie and then he disappeared.

The frightened mate, standing by the kicking wheel, watched the *Randolph Perry* coming out of the northwest, he said, and at first he felt nothing but despair when it became obvious to him she would cross the schooner's bows too far off to inspect her very closely. He debated for some time whether he should chance lifting a signal of some sort, but decided the risk was too great.

When the big bark, however, patently changed her course to signal them or hail them, the old mate was racked with a desperate indecision. He didn't want to be killed by Dawson, he explained. And he didn't want to let this golden opportunity to obtain help get away from him. In the end he decided to chance it, and when he saw the *Randolph Perry's* signals he acted.

He lashed the wheel again and, groping in a small locker just abaft the skylights, he procured an ensign from the flags that were kept there. This he attempted to hoist, in awkward jerks because of his weakness and, as he remarked, his constant apprehension that Dawson would appear. He had the flag almost halfway to the masthead when Dawson actually did appear, almost as if some instinct had warned him. He rushed at Manochie with a furious oath, pulling a belaying pin from the rail and striking the old seaman upon the head before he could dodge. That was all.

An extraordinary affair! Manochie shuddered at the conclusion of his recital.

III

CAPTAIN HARDY'S apprehension of the ramifications and the implications of this narrative, given in its starkest form by the injured Manochie upon the tossing poop of the *Esmerald*, took no very great amount of time. The captain had, subconsciously, already formed a very good idea of the species of disaster that had overwhelmed the schooner, and what he now learned served to confirm his beliefs and amplify his theories.

He was profoundly moved. It pointed out to him, in a very clear manner, the manifest incompetence of Captain Dawson. He could not, himself, conceive of any shipmaster allowing matters to go to such extremes as they had obviously gone on the *Esmerald*. He did not take into consideration, nor did he fully understand, the depths of passion into which Captain Dawson had been drawn, the intrigues that had swept about him to his own undoing.

Himself a man with an instinct for dignity, with a large control over his emotions, Captain Hardy was incapable of genuine tolerance for another who allowed himself to be overcome. He felt a contempt for those other men who had been swept away; he was aware of a strong repugnance toward Julia Fordley; but in the last analysis he blamed Captain Dawson alone. It had been his vessel; his responsibility.

The whole structure of seamanship and discipline collapsed when a master suffered himself to enjoy the luxuries of emotion, of ease and freedom such as common men indulged in. Captain Hardy seriously felt that Captain Dawson had betrayed his caste.

He was pondering upon this aspect of the case, while his boatswain poured more whisky for Manochie, when Mrs. Fordley appeared on the poop. She had knotted her crimson shawl loosely about her throat and she was literally staggering under an amazing amount of baggage, having thoroughly looted, as the captain

surmised, everything of real value from the various cabins below. She was in no wise disturbed by the icy disgust in his glance, but seemed pleasantly excited at the prospect of leaving the schooner, as if she looked forward to new pleasures and conquests on board the *Randolph Perry*.

Captain Hardy made a mental note to profit by what he had learned of her exploits upon the *Esmerald*. He would, if necessary, confine her to her room for the whole of the voyage. He felt a distinct sense of horror as she approached him. It was incredible that one so young and beautiful could be the cause of bloodshed and violence, could destroy the essential dignity and honor of strong men.

"I'm all ready," she said calmly, smiling at him. "I'll be glad to get away from this terrible ship."

Captain Hardy made no reply to this and, impressed by something visible in his cold blue eyes, she sobered a little and pouted, lifting one shoulder in her characteristic shrug.

"Why do you look at me like that? I haven't done anything wrong. I didn't tell him to kill everybody like that."

She paused and waited anxiously for his reply, but as none was forthcoming she glanced, suddenly frightened, from him to Manochie and then to the boatswain. Both men were looking at her, the boatswain with a manner of fascinated horror, Manochie with a calm, grim sternness that was unnerving. She turned to Captain Hardy again, biting her lip.

"They can't do anything to me, can they?" she said, uncertainly. "It wasn't my fault." She must have guessed that Manochie had told the story.

Captain Hardy removed one hand from his side pocket and carefully adjusted his damp, peaked cap, drawing it lower over his eyes.

"No," he said gently. "There is nothing they can do to you."

She stared at him, her pupils distending a trifle, as if a cold shaft had struck through her with the quiet regret his

voice held. She hesitated a moment and then sat petulantly down upon the skylight, a short distance from the injured mate. Captain Hardy watched her as she fussed with her bundles, an irritated wonder growing within him. There was nothing they could do to her, nothing at all. It did not seem right. The laws of man were all wrong. For an instant he had the thought he should not have shot Dawson when he was trying to wrench that cutlass free of the bulkhead, to strike again. Yet what else was there? And now there was nothing that could be done. There was God, of course, but God was slow, and sometimes He seemed to forget, or have no care.

There was a long period of silence between those four on the poop, Manochie huddled on the skylight near the woman, the boatswain watching the captain's face, and Captain Hardy, his hands deep in his pockets, staring bleakly across the dismal sea, the rain misting in his beard. He roused himself at last, however.

"Call the boat alongside," he said. "We'll take Mr. Manochie with us."

The boatswain carefully handed to Manochie the whisky bottle and the china mug he still held, and with a muttered acknowledgement of the captain's orders went slowly down the port companion to the main deck. After some while he returned, followed by two seamen, and these aided Manochie to the rail where the longboat tossed and waited. Captain Hardy followed the injured man, without a glance at Mrs. Fordley and taking no notice at all of her peremptory demand that some one aid her with her baggage. She flung imprecations at the captain's back and sat furiously upon the skylight again, unable to believe that one of the seamen would not be sent to aid her.



CAPTAIN HARDY halted when he had reached the rail above where the longboat waited. He watched Manochie lowered to the stern sheets and then stared aft, inscrutable, upright, gravely

patient. Far off he saw a dark squall bearing down upon the schooner, but he had no apprehension. There was not enough wind in such squalls today to cause any great trouble. He thought he would send Mr. Lamont, his mate, on board the *Esmerald*, with a small crew to take her to port. The two men locked in the galley, undoubtedly still shivering and scared out of their wits, could wait until Mr. Lamont arrived. It would have to be Mr. Lamont because the second mate of the *Randolph Perry* was not sufficiently experienced for such a task as this would be. Neither was the Third.

That annoyed Captain Hardy too. He disliked losing his first officer. He would have to stand a watch himself now, have to keep a sharp eye on the younger mates. His annoyance gave way to another, one that had been gnawing at his mind.

He was not a particularly devout man, but he had always accepted without question some Presence that ordered the world. A sort of supreme Master Mariner, as it were, commanding the great stone vessel that floated in space and steered between the stars. He had always presumed such a Master to be, vaguely, like the master of a ship upon the sea, a commander like himself, a strict disciplinarian (Had He not laid down His own Articles, His laws?)

Captain Hardy had never consciously thought this out. It was part of him, molded in some inscrutable manner with his beliefs as to what a ship captain should and should not be. The analogy was sound enough. A captain was a god upon his own vessel, out of sight of land. He could make men and break them; kill them, marry them, bury them. His word was final. His judgments were beyond question.

It came now to Captain Hardy, somewhat against his will because the idea seemed faintly sacrilegious, that the great Master Mariner was in this instance falling into an error. As Captain Hardy had instinctively blamed Captain Dawson for all that had taken place upon the *Esmerald*, so now he felt inclined to ac-

cuse God of laxity, of indifference. It was wholly unreasonable that Julia Fordley should go her way in peace. Somewhere judgment had slipped. He did not like it. He felt he could not approve of it. He was, indeed, when he pondered the matter, somewhat surprised at God.

A master should render dispassionate sentence when the need arose, maintain discipline. Captain Hardy felt something of his respect for God ooze away from him. He had, himself, faced this problem and achieved some end to it, whether for the best or not he did not care to say. But he had faced it at least, even to killing a man. He felt that God should do no less. It was wholly unfair to leave it to him in its entirety.

He gazed moodily aft toward the poop, waiting for the woman. And then he saw her come to view, obviously angry at being neglected, staggering beneath the weight and awkwardness of her many bundles. A predatory animal, the captain thought. Pitiless. Without moral sense. Beautiful and passionate, to turn men's hearts to water and stir their blood, bringing out the brute in them. He watched her with an aloofness unusual even for him, as he might have watched some monstrosity of the sea come up to disport alongside his vessel.

She came toward the companion to descend to the main deck and the longboat, and as she came the dark squall that had been racing in overwhelmed her. There was gust of cooler air, then a torrential burst of rain that flooded the sleek decks. The schooner rolled heavily as the wind gathered a brief momentum and struck her. Captain Hardy uttered a sharp exclamation and took his hands from his pockets, involuntarily moving forward a pace as if to run. Mrs. Fordley had slipped on the streaming planks of the poop.

He saw her make an effort, at recovery and then, overcome by her own momentum and the weight of her many bundles, make a sort of hesitating half run toward the rail, as people will when the deck slants abruptly beneath them. She

struck the rail with her thighs and, unable to check herself, doubled over and fell forward. There was one wild, despairing shriek that the wind muffled and whipped away. A faint splash, more guessed at than heard. The schooner rolled back, water streaming from her scuppers, her rigging jarring triumphantly. Captain Hardy leaned over the side and spoke sharply to the men in the waiting longboat, fending off from the threatening hull.

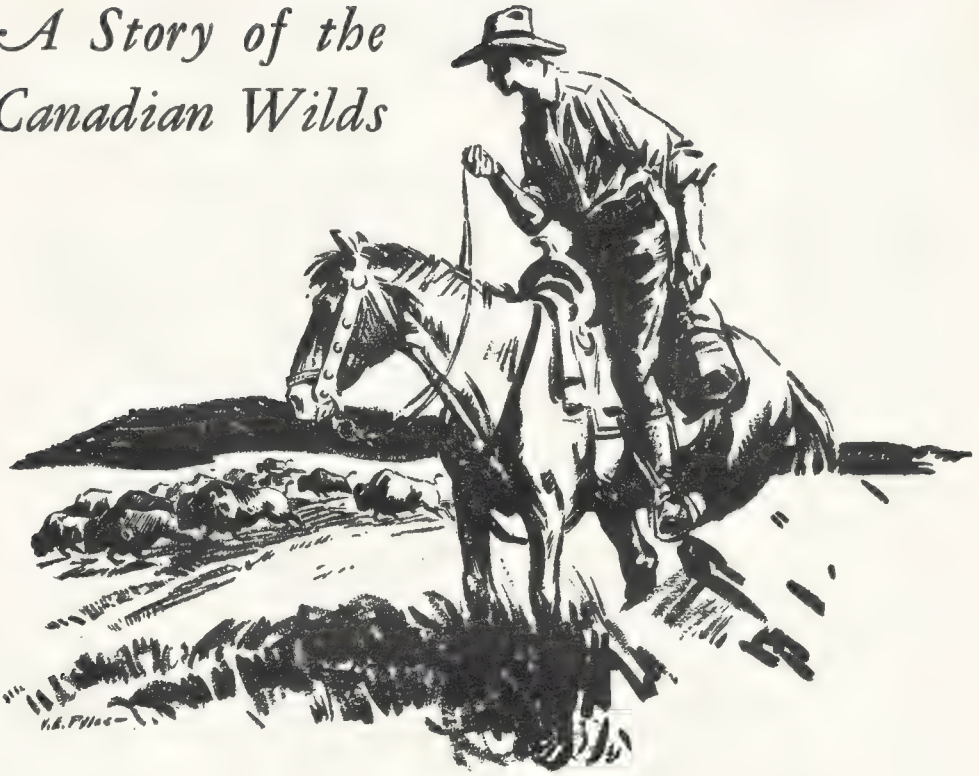
Perhaps they did not catch what he said. Perhaps they did not care. In any event, they did not move, except to lift startled faces toward him. The boatswain in the stern sheets, the injured Manochie at his feet, stared into the captain's eyes. He did not repeat his order. Held by some inscrutable force, his glance remained fastened to the boatswain's for one long drawn moment. And then he deliberately thrust his leg across the rail and dropped into the longboat as it lifted on a swell to receive him. Subconsciously he noticed the hurried forward movement of many lean shark fins, the water rippling as they went.

The squall brushed across the sea, a dark wall of windy rain; a sullen shadow upon the earth; a brief boiling of the elements that disappeared to leeward; born of hidden forces to hammer and destroy; fading toward hidden forces again; darkening for a moment the face of the heavens, the bosom of the waters, as a shadow darkens the heart of man, as desire his mind; to pass on and leave peace. The schooner lifted to the swell, her masts circling arcs across the sky. The patient drizzle fell softly, whispering upon the stretchers of the longboat and upon the oilskins of the men.

"Give way," said Captain Hardy gravely, and the boat pushed off.

She climbed a smooth, unchastened slope that gurgled beneath her. Captain Hardy moved the tiller and notched the bow upon the *Randolph Perry* rolling in the rainy mist. He felt relieved, a little regretful because of his censures and his doubts. He did not look behind him.

*A Story of the
Canadian Wilds*



Black Robe's BUFFALO

By A. DEHERRIES SMITH

"WE'LL show those buffalo rustlers where they get off at, old-timer," Dave Kirby told his sweating pony, flailing at the little animal's flanks with his Stetson to dislodge the bulldog flies.

"You know how it is," the ranger added apologetically. "We're riding herd on the last mob of wild buffalo in North America and we've got to keep moving, flies or no flies."

Kirby's words were half humorous, but his narrowed eyes and tense face belied

them. As he rode on through the sub-Arctic's stifling Summer heat those thoughts that had oppressed him for the last month came to the surface again.

The Mounted Police were still inquiring why the Chipewyans had moved their lodges up from Lake Athabasca to the vicinity of the Peace reserve, but they hadn't got beyond the inquiry stage yet. It was an open secret that the Slavi tribes on the Great Slave Lake were heading southward in their birchbarks too. Why? The Mounted seemed at a loss to know.

Hadn't Takin's boy told him that there was talk in the tepees of a great meat hunt, and of braves who had risen to query why the men of the North should live forever on fish and rabbits when their own country was full of big game? The natives had hunted buffaloes until the government stepped in, thirty years back. And now it had been pretty well drummed into the tribes that the buffaloes were protected by the Great White King. The natives would hardly cut loose on the reserve—or would they?

"Sounds ugly, anyhow," Kirby told himself. "By all the signs there's some white in the background here, trying to make himself an *oogiemaw* with the Indians. If a bunch of nitchies get in on the buffalo they'll go meat mad and kill just for the pure delight of it. These birds don't know that the herds here are the last of the buffalo that once blackened the plains from the Rio Grande to the Saskatchewan. Don't suppose they'd give a whoop about that, anyhow. Maybe there's nothing to it, but I've got to stop the thing before it gets started."

The pony broke step, picking his way daintily through a mass of churned up mud, baked by the blistering sun into something akin to waves of brick. When the pony's pace slackened, a horde of thick bodied bulldog flies hovering overhead swarmed down at the chestnut and his rider, filling the still air with their venomous humming.

The pony threshed violently with his long tail, shook his mane and charged around the edge of the Big Lobstick buffalo wallow. Except for the man and horse the pan of drying mud was deserted. Distant rumblings and crashings from the nearby thickets told Kirby, however, that even the heavily coated buffaloes had been forced to take refuge in the brush from the maddening flies.

All at once the little horse saw the entrance to the tunnel-like trail leading to Fort Cassette and he did not forget that along it grew a thousand clumps of willow brush just right for brushing brutal flies off of his lathered belly. He

made for it full tilt, despite the sluggish heat of the day.

Kirby bent his head to avoid the reaching branches of spruce that overhung the trail and gave the pony the bit. The pony snorted his satisfaction as he smashed a passage through the willows and, once freed of the flies, cantered smoothly along the sandy trail over the pine ridges.

The ranger had ridden less than a mile when the pony suddenly sidestepped and came to an abrupt halt, nostrils blowing. The cause of the animal's alarm became apparent when a tall, slouching figure stepped around a turn in the trail, an old muzzle loader in the crook of his arm.

"Halfbreeds on the hike," Kirby said to himself, his mind again crowded with suspicions. "Mouthy Lebeau and his squaw headed out somewhere."

Lebeau was a familiar figure in his torn deerskins, his high cheeked features topped by one of the white-banded black Stetsons favored by the Territories breeds. Behind him were two huskies, loaded down with heavy packs, red tongued and panting. The procession was completed by the man's wife, shawled, and burdened with camp gear.

"Where are you off to, Lebeau?" Kirby queried, heeling the pony over.

"*Atawaywe kamick*—the Hudson's Bay post—" the breed returned in Cree, running his slant eyes over the man on the chestnut. "What business is it of yours?" he added in excellent mission English.

"No one is allowed to go through the buffalo reserve," Kirby answered, holding his temper in check by an effort. "Keep to the trail or I'll turn you back."

"Ah! An' who are you?" Lebeau queried, laughter in his voice. He swept aside the clustering flies, let the muzzle of his ancient weapon drop and grinned a challenge.

"You point that cannon the other way and don't give me any of your chat," Kirby called. He swung from the pony and as his boots touched the sand he struck the gun aside. "I'm running the

buffalo reserve, and what I say goes."

"*Namoyal Namoyal*!" the woman called, running forward and thrusting herself between the two men. "We are poor. We got to fish below the rapids. This is a true word. Let there be no striving between you. *Ay-ayah. Ay-ayah. Tana anima meskana ni ka mittiman?*"

"You know what road to take all right, Ajigan," the ranger retorted, his voice softer by reason of the anxiety and fright stamped on the woman's brown face. "Take the straight road to the rapids and do not tufn. No one may enter the buffalo reserve. I have spoken."

Lebeau's lips curled in contempt, but his eyes dropped under Kirby's steady stare. He threw the muzzle loader back into the crook of his arm, called to the dogs and padded off.

"Keep to the trail!" Kirby called after the receding figures, as he remounted the pony. Ajigan nodded her shawled head violently. Her man spat.

"A slinking coyote," the ranger mused to himself. "I'd like to know what the devil he's after. But, after all, there may be nothing wrong with him. I've got to watch myself. Won't do to get nervy. Go ahead, Pat," he spoke to the pony.



AN HOUR later Kirby rode out on to the flat above the Slave, his ears filled with the drumming of the rapids that flung white fingers across the mile of water. Pelicans were fishing in the backwaters, snow-white against the dull greenery of the woods beyond, but he took no notice of them. One glance showed him that the Mounted Police patrol boat and two trading schooners were still tied up to the rough dock below Fort Cassette, but he was not interested in them now. His eyes jumped to the Arctic Trading Company's white-washed log walls and to some figures lounging there in the veranda shade.

"It's the mission hunters," the ranger told himself.

There were two horses tied to the hitching rail before the post and their presence

confirmed Kirby's guess. The natives in the Territories were all canoe and dog Indians he knew well enough. There were less than a score of horses in the post and no one except Napoleon Majeau and Pete Rudin would be so lazy or brutal as to tie up a pony without protection against the flies.

Kirby nodded curtly in reply to a lazy wave from the veranda, halted his pony fifty yards from the post and slid to the ground. He unfastened his slicker and threw it over Pat's neck and withers, loosened the cinches, dragged out the saddle blanket and covered the pony's loins. That done he set about making a fire with the deftness of the wilderness trained.

He quickly gathered up an armful of wood, smashed an old grocery box with his boot heel; and when he had the fire going well he covered it carefully with sods and earth. A blue column welled up. With a nicker of appreciation, Pat edged into the friendly smoke, standing with his white face almost in the fire.

"Pretty skookum?" Kirby asked the pony. "You stay with it," he added. "I've got business with those two loafers over there."

The buffalo ranger's gray eyes were narrowed in disgust as he strode toward the post. The two horses at the hitching rail were swishing their tails at the clouds of flies, digging up dust with their unshod hoofs and vainly endeavoring to shield their blood splotted heads under each other's necks.

"Well, if that ain't the limit!" Pete Rudin's gruff voice exclaimed when the buffalo ranger untied the two ponies, stuffed their reins through the throat lashes and watched them rush off to join the pony at the smudge.

The big man humped himself back against the wall and half got to his feet when Napoleon Majeau's moccasin kicked him on the shin. Rudin nodded in understanding, shot a stream of tobacco juice out into the dust and subsided with a half grin.

"Sure hot," Kirby offered. His spurs

rang on the veranda boards and he proceeded to mop a dusty face with his neckerchief. "Mounted Police boat still in. If Sergeant Conroy happened along here he'd read the riot act to you for leaving your ponies standing out like that."

"The heat she sure get you," Majeau put in, his lazy drawl cutting off Rudin's growl. "What a country, *hein*? In the winter sixty below, in the summer same as live in cook stove. *Ma foi*, all the time I am tired, me."

"Uh-huh," Rudin replied to this explanation.

His eyes were still on the newcomer, mentally measuring the young ranger's long body. His gaze went from Kirby's sandy hair to the white skin usually sheltered by the collar of his old khaki shirt, where the ranger's bronze tan abruptly ended in a sharp line about his neck.

Somehow Kirby's straight backed briskness irked the other man. No need to be so restless in this heat, Rudin thought. Why not pipe down and take it easy until the Fall like other men do? You could see, too, that the ranger had washed the canvas trousers tucked into his riding boots. And those silver Mexican spurs—that was pure swank. Might be wide shouldered and narrow waisted, as Bess Laronde was always blabbing about, but this chap was an outright dude. Rudin spat again.

"Came in to see you men about the meat hunting," Kirby announced, withdrawing his gaze from the three ponies at the smudge and fixing his eyes on the recumbent forms.

Majeau shrugged his narrow shoulders and spread both hands with an affected French gesture. Thirty-five biting Winters and scorching sub-Arctic Summers had left their mark on the little man. He was withered and dried up looking, but the deeply set brown eyes betokened an agile brain. He still wore his thick mackinaw Winter shirt, open to the waist for coolness. His legs were encased in deerskin trousers belonging to the same period, while the customary moccasins covered his feet. Now, but for his beady,

restless eyes, Majeau might have been dead, so well had he perfected his art of loafing.

It was Rudin who spoke.

"Well, kid, what you want to see us about?" he demanded, his tones direct and aggressive.

Kirby shot the speaker a quick glance. He made no immediate reply but went over and sat on the veranda rail, rolling himself a cigaret. There was something about Rudin's tones that always sent the buffalo ranger's temper mounting upward. Rudin's age topped Kirby's twenty-five by about a dozen years, and there was always that in his voice which suggested an adult addressing a small boy.

Kirby disliked the man's thickset complacency, his red lidded eyes, his scrubbily bearded face and his arrogant raggedness. But more than all he objected to Rudin's being anywhere in Bess Laronde's vicinity. The man's reputation was thoroughly bad.

"I want to warn you about those buffalo again," Kirby drawled at length, sending blue smoke spirals about his head. "The humpies are keeping close to the timber now on account of the flies and they're hard to see. There's one mob right on the Salt Pan prairie. No mistakes about the shooting, Rudin. Get that? It's a damn fool trick of the government, allowing the missionaries to kill meat in the reserve. However, what I'm getting at is that you two can shoot the moose and deer needed for the Black Robes, but be careful. If a buffalo gets shot in mistake for a moose the shooter goes in the jug. That's plain, eh?"

"Oh, sure, sure," Majeau put in hastily, noting Rudin's darkening face. "We have hunt meat for the Black Robes many seasons, not so? Yes. Now the government, of a great kindness, has given permission to shoot moose and deer on the buffalo reserve. It is well. We do not travel so far in the great heat. There will be no errors, *mon ami*, no errors."

Kirby nodded. The government's

action was practically a gift of free meat to the missionaries. Heretofore the buffalo reserve had been closed to all men, white, brown and red. In the passing years the things of the wild had somehow come to know they were safe wherever the buffalo roamed, and now the reserve's ten thousand square miles harbored countless caribou, moose and deer.

Yes, it was all right to let the Black Robes have the meat for the mission children. But opening the reserve was a bad precedent. Of course, the Indians would argue that if the mission was allowed to kill game on the reserve they had even a better right to do so. This generosity to the Black Robes complicated thing for the rangers.

Kirby finished his smoke in thoughtful silence, glanced over to see that the smudge was all right, and passed into the post. A stocky, white haired man was busily engaged in stacking canned goods on his shelves, turning the brightly tinted labels outward for the benefit of his Indian customers.

"Hello, Bolan," Kirby called a greeting.

"Hello." The trader's response was equally short. His quick eyes ranged the other man, as he turned away from the shelves, waiting.

"I found a young buffalo killed back on the Salt Spring creek a few days ago," Kirby announced. "Either wolves or some one hunting with dogs. Queer thing about it was that the skin was gone. You know that there are generally some fragments of hair lying about if dogs or wolves do the killing. No one offered you any buffalo hides in trade?"

"Listen, Kirby," the trader challenged, his leathery face flushed with sudden anger. "I know the fur game and I'm not such a fool as to take any stuff that isn't right. Best try the detective act somewhere else. I'm busy."

"Not accusing you at all," the ranger replied, a half apology in his voice. "If any hunter comes in with buffalo hides, though, I want to hear about it, that's all. So long."

Bolan slammed a case of canned to-

matoes on the counter with a resounding thump, favoring Kirby with an icy stare, as the ranger wheeled about and passed out on to the veranda again.

"I tink mebbe we go get us another moose this afternoon," Majeau suggested, the words for Kirby but his eyes on Rudin. "This week we do not shoot any and the gove'ment say one every week. Because of the flies they will be in the bush and not far, mebbe."

Rudin laughed deep down in his great barrel of a chest, but made no reply to the other man. He returned to his previous pastime of whetting his knife on a fragment of soft sandstone taken from the river bed.

"You can get one close in so there's no need to ride all over the range," Kirby said in reply to Majeau's suggestion. "Some of these old buffalo bulls are darned cranky, what with the heat and the flies, and I don't want the herds stampeded about. Guess I'll go. Mind what I said about the careful shooting, Rudin."

The big man's fingers closed about the knife hilt. He jabbed the keen blade into the veranda floor with a violent gesture. The muscles of his neck and jaws quivered, but once more he caught Majeau's glittering eyes and subsided.



KIRBY clattered down the veranda steps and walked across to his pony. He settled the fire for the benefit of the two other horses, saddled, and swung up. He was greeted by a flight of bulldog flies as he left the smudge's friendly black column.

He rode along the brink of the Slave's high bank, pulling in to watch the scene below him. Khaki figures aboard the police patrol boat were hauling in the shore lines, and from her stern the Canadian ensign fluttered blood-red against the churned water below the rapids. Sergeant Conroy was off for Fort Resolution, Kirby knew. Well, if any trouble developed now he would have to go it alone, he told himself. The

patrol would be away for a good two weeks.

The chestnut pony had seen enough. He took the matter into his own keeping, wrenched his head free and set out for the shelter of the timbered trail at a run. Kirby let him go, his eye on the trading post's veranda as he galloped past. Both Majeau and Rudin were still stretched in the shade.

The pony's hoofs spurned the sand. He charged into the leafy tunnel leading to the Ghost Lake ranger cabin. Half an hour's fast riding carried the ranger clear of the timber and out on to a wide prairie, fringed by the ever present poplar woods. Willow bushes, bent and broken by the buffaloes' rolling and trampling, spotted the opening. Beyond was a shallow creek, white lipped with outcroppings of salt and well trampled by the lords of the North.

Kirby, with all his senses on the alert, rode around the edge of the prairie, heading due west. Time and again he heard the thrashings in the brush denoting that the buffaloes were protecting themselves from the flies, but he saw little of his charges except an occasional half hidden, humped shape. Then all at once three young buffaloes charged out on to the open, pursued by a huge, lumbering old bull.

"Old One Eye himself in person," the ranger exclaimed, mild exultation in his voice. "Raising hob with the young stock again. Well, you ornery old pirate, you're just in the place I wanted you to be. Haven't any time to spare but I'll hightail you out of here."

He clucked to the pony, jerked a long, loaded quirt off the saddle horn and swung it around his head as Pat carried him forward at a swinging gallop, for a moment clear of the flies.

With the appearance of the horseman the four buffaloes stopped dead in their tracks, presenting a united front to the enemy, shaggy heads down, their short tails flickering. Old One Eye threw a cloud of dry dirt over his immense shoulders and bellowed a challenge.

"Ramble, One Eye, ramble!" Kirby yelled as he rode down on the old bull.

When almost within reach of its short, threatening horns the watchful pony swung out in response to Kirby's knee pressure and the loaded quirt stung the bull on the tender spot behind the horns.

One of the other animals made a tentative attempt to charge the horse, but as suddenly changed his mind when a horde of flies settled on him. He swung about and with the two other youngsters at his heels made off into the brush with a mighty crashing.

"You're for it," Kirby called to old One Eye, reining Pat around. "Maybe you don't know it, but you're going to get to the devil out of here and leave those yearlings alone."

Speed had long since left the one time monarch of the Peace plains, but tenacious courage was still a part of him. He met the oncoming horse with lowered head and another pawed up cloud of dust. Kirby rode through the flying earth and again the quirt came down on One Eye's tender spot. He shook his great head and, grunting his disgust, made for the timber at a shambling lope.

But the flying chestnut was before him, at one side and behind him at seemingly all and the one time, and still the quirt bit in through his thick hide. One Eye attempted to stop to consider the matter, but the quirt was relentless and before he was rightly aware of it he was pounding across the prairie with Pat sidestepping and popping in and out behind him.

Kirby herded the panting old bull down the prairie, swung him at the trail, and drove him up along it for several miles before he finally left the winded brute gasping and bellowing under the shade of a wide branched spruce tree.

"Half an hour shot and every minute counts," the ranger told himself, looping the quirt back over the horn. "Maybe I'm a fool to leave this side of the range open, but I've got to get back to the Ghost Lake cabin and get the other men on the phone. Have to chance it. Let's travel, Pat."

As he rode back, sitting loosely in the saddle and giving the pony his head, the buffalo ranger picked up the sights and sounds that always called to him. But now, although they registered on his brain, they left no impression.

The scolding of the squirrels in the branches overhead came to his ears, and when he rode out on to the prairie once more and tore across it he was accompanied by unnoticed flights of red winged blackbirds and shrill voiced buffalo birds.

The wet wallows at Jackfish Creek were tenanted by a hundred or more buffaloes, protecting their hides against the insect attacks with thick coatings of mud.

"Stay with it," the ranger called when half a dozen of the brutes lumbered to their feet and shook mud plastered heads in his direction. "You have my sympathy," he added. "And just as soon as I get some more fly dope on Pat I'll come back and look you over. You may be bad tempered and ugly, but by the great Lord Harry, you're the last wild buffalo in America and you're going to stay put."

Kirby rode into another green tunnel and finally came to where the ranger cabin was perched on a high ridge overlooking the tree mirrored waters of Ghost Lake. He glanced at the geese preening their feathers on a long sand spit, and watched a flight of black ducks hit the water in a series of graceful slides. But such things would have to wait until evening. No time now.

Without being checked Pat galloped straight for the log barn, clattering into the flyless shadows as Kirby flung himself off, just at the door. He stripped the pony, shut the door and entered the cabin.

Tossing his hat on to the bunk in one corner, the ranger went to the telephone and commenced calling one ranger station after another.

"Indians on the Calumet? Who? Oh, Kiyu's mob. Well, you know damn well they've got no right to be there," he

checked the ranger at Caribou Hills. "Get them off, Dick; right away. Watch out for Mouthy Lebeau, too. Saw him and his squaw on the main trail. Said they were going fishing, which might be so at that. All right. Get after Kiyu. So long."

"Nothing doing," was the laconic response from the two other outposts and, satisfied at length that the main menace to the herds lay in his own territory, Kirby rang off.

A hurried plunge in the lake followed, with a wild whirring of wings as a result. The ranger swam ashore, but mindful of past experiences with flies he did not wait to dry himself but climbed, wet skinned, into his clothes.

He gave Pat a good scrubbing with coarse slough hay, thoroughly oiled him with fly dope, and once more saddled. Going back to the cabin for his gun and hat, he stopped suddenly, midway between the two buildings, the sun wrinkles puckering up into little ridges about his eyes.

"They're at it," the ranger told himself, when a distant *pum* reached his ears.

He stood motionless, mentally placing the direction of the rifle shot. Then he ran into the cabin, returned with his gun belt and hat, and in another minute was galloping back the way he had come.

He reached the wet wallows to find that the buffaloes had left the ever delightful ooze and were in full flight across the prairie, humped backs in furious motion.

"Scared stiff. Must have got a whiff of a strange man scent," Kirby said to the pony's flickering ears, as he watched the last of the buffaloes crash into the timber screen and disappear.

He headed in the direction from which he imagined he had heard the rifle shot. The little horse's sides were in a white lather when at length the ranger rode clear of the brushy trail and the pony's hoofs pounded on the hard wallow. He reined Pat over and tore along through the redtop grass on the smoother and higher sides of the slough.



ALMOST opposite the place where he had seen One Eye and the young bulls that morning a score of shaggy brutes lumbered out of the timber and, after some indecision, wheeled about and headed off into the timber at the head of the wallow. Almost at the same instant Kirby's narrowed eyes glimpsed something on four feet that certainly was not a buffalo.

Pat's mane was slashing his face as, bent double and putting his weight on the horse's shoulders as well as he was able, Kirby tore across the prairie to a wild tattoo of hoof beats. He jerked the Colt out of its holster, heeled the pony over, and raced into the timber, heedless of the branches that stung his head and thighs.

"No use," he told himself, pulling up in disgust and staring into the mass of foliage facing him.

He could hear nothing but Pat's gasping breaths, and an inspection of the ground moss told him that it would be a lengthy task to follow those faint hoof marks through the woods. There was no time for that now.

With an oath of disappointment he swung about once more and again rode out on to the wallow. As he did so a new light reached his eyes.

"By Jupiter, it is!" Kirby exulted. A rumbling chorus of distant bellows reached his ears. "We'll go, Pat." He flicked the pony's neck with the reins.

Glancing backward over his shoulder time and again as the chestnut galloped across the wallow, Kirby mentally figured the position of the place where the trail to Fort Cassette left the prairie and its deviation from a true north course. He entered the brush at about where One Eye had left it in the morning, making a slow passage forward through a dense second growth of poplar saplings, broken and bent by the passage of the fly tortured herds.

As he went on again and again his ears were saluted by those menacing bellows, growing louder each moment. Finally he rode out on to one of the numerous small prairies that speckled the terrain to find

fully two hundred buffalo charging back and forth. Some of the bulls were fighting, the cows were bawling, but in general the major portion of the herd was facing the timber on the far side of the prairie, throwing dust and making threatening gestures with their heads toward the wall of greenery before them.

"Blood," Kirby said grimly to himself. "There's a fresh kill on the other side of the poplar screen and it's driving the humpies loco. We'll go."

The ranger gave the agitated buffaloes a wide berth and, reaching the scrub on the far side of the opening, slid off the pony. With the reins in one hand and the revolver in the other he made a cautious passage through the poplars.

He came to the edge of another little prairie. In the center of it was a bloody mound of meat which a man was hastily cutting up. Beyond him a pony was tied to a clump of willows, swishing madly at the clouds of flies attracted by the meat.

"Monsieur Majeau got his moose, eh," Kirby thought. "All alone, too. Guess I'd better wait."

Pulling a bottle out of his saddle wallet, the ranger went over Pat's lathered coat with the fly dope and, satisfied at length that the pony was free of the winged pests, he tied him to a tree and went back toward the kill.

He was almost in sight of the prairie again when a thin shout sounded from ahead, answered by a heavier voice. Kirby reached the edge of the screen to see Rudin ride into the little clearing on a sweaty horse.

Majeau greeted his associate with much hand waving. Rudin growled something that the ranger could not catch, slid to the ground, gave the horse a slap with the butt of his Winchester and threw the weapon down. The two talked for a moment, then Rudin pulled out his sheath knife and set to work on the carcass.

Kirby slid his revolver back into the holster, leaving the flap unbuttoned. He left the timber without noise and, keeping the two bent backs directly in front of

him, began walking slowly across the trampled grass.

The afternoon sun was low, and it was not until Kirby's shadow fell across the meat that Rudin looked up. The color left the man's face. His lips moved but no sounds reached them.

"Aha! Hello, Dave!" Majeau called cheerily, the first to recover his poise. "We mak' the kill like you say, close to the trail. Very good luck, not so?"

"Sure is." The ranger smiled back at Majeau's twitching face. "That's a fine moose all right. Should feed the mission kids for a week, anyhow."

Majeau admitted with eloquent hands that this was so. Then he bent to his knife work again, one eye on his own Winchester, propped against a willow bush a dozen yards away.

Kirby measured the distance to the weapon; to Rudin's as well. It was closer, the butt pointing conveniently toward the big man's itching fingers.

"What became of the legs, the head and the hide?" the ranger asked, nodding at the carcass.

"*Ma foi*, but of what use are these things to the Black Robes?" Majeau pleaded, hands again in motion. "We are poor. We mak' the bones for soup, the moccasins from the hide. Not so, Pete?"

"Uh-huh."

"Pete was doing the delivery act, back there on the wallow, I guess?" Kirby queried, striving to keep the sarcasm out of his voice. "Seemed to be packing quite a load. Thought I knew that old knock kneed gray of his. Dang these flies anyhow. Must be a million of 'em to the square yard."

Rudin grunted again, chewing his thick lips. Majeau laughed agreeably.

"Poor One Eye," Kirby lamented. "Dangdest old pest on the reserve. Figured I'd have to shoot him, but of course I don't need to do that now. Ha-ha. I suppose he was under that spruce tree over on the trail? Guess the poor old fellow was tired and wouldn't wander far after the hunt I gave him."

"The one eye? What is—?"

"It's hot. Reckon I'll go over to the creek an' get me a drink," Rudin broke in, throwing the knife down and getting to his feet.

Majeau shrugged his shoulders, washing his hands of what his partner planned.

"It is hot," Kirby agreed. "I'll take a drink too."

As the big man moved off on a course that would carry him within reaching distance of the rifle, Kirby walked with him.

"That's very dark meat for a moose, isn't it?" the ranger suggested conversationally. "Looks more like buffalo to me. However, I can hardly blame you. This weather is really too hot to go chasing round the jungles looking for moose when you can find a buffalo parked right in the trail."

With half turned head Kirby saw that Majeau had taken a few paces toward his rifle.

Rudin had noted that movement too and a glint of satisfaction lighted his eyes. Before Kirby's head was back, he too dived for the rifle.

"Drop it!" the ranger ordered, grasping the revolver out of the holster and plunging forward.

Rudin replied with an oath, just as Majeau's thin voice sounded—

"I come, I come!"

Rudin slashed the Winchester through the air with all the power in his body, but Kirby's head was not there. The long revolver barrel shot out and up, catching Rudin across the nose. With a snort of pain he dropped the rifle, stumbling backward with both hands pressed to his face.

Kirby jammed his boot toe under the Winchester's butt and sent it slithering across the grass. He wheeled just in time to see Majeau's beady eyes fixed on him behind the sights of the other rifle.

Click. Majeau's finger pressed the trigger but there was no other reply from the weapon. The man's eyes widened. He dropped the stock to his hip, jerking at the reloading lever. Before he had

time to complete the movement Kirby was on him.

"Quit!" the buffalo ranger rapped out. "Quit or I'll blow you to hell!"

The Colt's muzzle was pressing against Majeau's stomach. The little man's knees shook, his claw-like fingers relaxed and the Winchester thudded to the ground.

"Stand where you are. Don't move," the ranger ordered as he caught the rifle by the barrel and pitched it away. Standing over Rudin, he urged him to rise with an emphatic boot toe.

"I took a chance," Kirby said agreeably to the little man when Rudin blundered to his feet. "Figured that after you brought old One Eye down you would be too shiftless and lazy to jerk another shell into the breech. Came out exactly that way, eh?"

Majeau grinned faintly, made as though to motion apologetically with his hands, and opened his lips to speak.

"What you goin' to do?" Rudin asked, his voice shaken with pain but still surly.

"Not a thing except that I want you to carry a message for me to those Indian friends of yours." Kirby laughed, slashing his Stetson through the air at the hovering flies. "Tell 'em that they won't have any buffalo hides to trade to that Syrian on the Big Fish. Also tell 'em to beat it back home," the ranger added. "You're free to go. Hot though, and as

you're going to walk back to the fort you might as well take off your clothes for coolness."

"*Sacre!* What of the flies? *Ma foi*, but—"

"Strip!" Kirby ordered, the jocularity gone from his voice. "I'm going to let your Indians know that you're nothing but a pair of *mooniasses*, and that it's bad medicine to monkey with our buffalo. Strip, or by Hector you'll do ten years in the Prince Albert pen. Get busy."

Majeau clucked something in Chipe-
wyan that Kirby could not catch. The big man eyed the ranger and the Colt, mumbled a thick reply and tore off his mackinaw shirt.

The ranger could see nothing humorous in the situation when the two men, stark naked but for their moccasins, started off across the prairie.

Rudin did not wait for his companion. Yelling curses, he plunged off, slamming at the bulldog flies that were already spotting his neck and shoulders. Majeau followed, bounding across the grass tussocks like a snowshoe rabbit, waving his thin arms and howling.

"What those flies will do to them before they get to the post will make talk in the Indian tepees for the next five years," the ranger said to himself, listening to the tortured men's cries. "If that doesn't cure the buffalo rustling, nothing will."



ALMOST A SAHIB



A Story of Modern India

By L. G. BLOCHMAN

GUNDRANESH DUTT, a dumpy, brown, well rounded Bengali *babu*, was chief of the native clerical staff at the West Bank Jute Mills, across the Hooghly from Calcutta and some miles upstream. He had come to Calcutta originally to pursue higher learning in English, unavailable in his upcountry village. Failure to pass the entrance examination to Calcutta University had diverted him into clerical channels, but his brief contact with abstract Western culture had made him champion of all that was British.

When he sat at his desk in the offices of the West Bank Jute Mills, he liked to

imagine himself almost an English gentleman. That he engaged in such Bengali vices as *pan* chewing, and stuffing himself with *ghee* soaked sweetmeats when home nights, was beside the point. When he used an English toothbrush to eradicate the red stains from his mouth after chewing *pan*, he felt that his Orientalism had been quite wiped out. And in the office he could feel nothing but Occidental, since he wore a celluloid collar and white duck trousers—even during the hot weather, when the loosely draped *dhoti* worn by the other *babus* was infinitely more comfortable.

He was bending solemnly over his

accounts when Ralph Winston, manager of the mills, approached his desk.

"I say, Dutt," called Winston.

A strong fragrance of cheap perfume was disengaged as Gundranesh Dutt stood up. Winston looked suspiciously at the *babu's* glossy black hair, carefully parted in the middle. He smiled, for he realized that the scent was merely a phase of Gundranesh Dutt's superiority over *babus* uncivilized enough to anoint themselves with coconut oil.

"Keep your seat, Dutt," said Winston, who was an unusual manager in that he did not enjoy obsequiousness from his personnel.

He was a youngish Britisher of a comfortable build that seemed to indicate a compromise between love of good food and love of sport. There was a tolerant light in his warm brown eyes.

Winston tossed an envelop to the *babu's* desk.

"I want you to take this chit to Calcutta tonight," he said. "This is your regular night in Calcutta anyway, isn't it?"

"Quite," said the *babu*. "Tonight is weekly meeting of Bengali Society for Translation of William Makepeace Thackeray into Vernacular Idioms. Naturally, as secretary, attendance is indispensable."

"Then I can depend upon you to take the chit to Mr. Pawser?"

"Quite," said Gundranesh Dutt.

Winston caught sight of a crooked English pipe lying conspicuously on the *babu's* desk. He had seen it there for some months, now, but noted that the varnish still seemed rather new about the bowl. With a twinkle in his eyes, he offered his tobacco pouch. The *babu* filled his pipe, lighted it, then puffed noisily and energetically. If he preferred the tapering, greenish, leaf wrapped native cigarets, he was not going to show it now. Suddenly his eyes bulged and he began coughing clouds of blue smoke.

"By the way, Dutt," said Winston, suppressing a smile. "The mill will be closed over Holi festival. I suppose you'll be busy celebrating."

Holi is a Hindu festival, celebrated largely by throwing or squirting red powder upon whoever happens to be walking abroad during the day. There is some legendary explanation to the effect that the red powder represents the blood of a monster killed by Vishnu the Preserver during one of his earthly excursions in the body of Krishna. But to most Hindus the squirting of red powder is sufficient in itself. The spirit of license and carnival which prevails on Holi acts as safety valve for the subject-race feelings of inarticulate Hindus. Gundranesh Dutt did not like to be considered as suffering from subject-race feelings.

"Absolutely contrariwise, Mr. Winston," he said. "My people have been favoring Shiva rather than Vishnu in past. Furthermore, you have no doubt been noticing that I am not partial to caste marks and similar superstitions. Such-like are for childish brains, Mr. Winston. I shall no doubt spend the day in Calcutta library with president of Bengali Thackeray society . . ."

Ralph Winston left the *babu* and entered a covered passage that led from the office to the mill building. As he entered the noisy vastness of the mill, he peered through the thick atmosphere, hazy with flying wisps of jute, looking for Henry Farrell, his assistant. As he walked, the floor beneath his feet trembled with the roar of looms weaving gunny. He found Farrell, tall, thin and straw haired, standing behind a group of Hindu women workers in red and green *saris*.

"Did you tell all the foremen that the mill would be closed over Holi?" Winston asked him.



FARRELL turned his blood-shot eyes upon Winston and grunted assent. The manager did not expect a full reply, for Farrell was talkative only when he was damning India and the East. He hated India with such vehemence that Winston suspected he might be under the dominance of a native mistress. Winston also suspected him of being a solitary

drinker, since the youth came and went alone, and often shut himself up in his own bungalow for long periods.

At first Winston had tried to make a friend of the youth, for Farrell was a second cousin and had been particularly recommended to Winston by Farrell senior, who was due to get a baronetcy the next time a conservative government had something to say about the honors list, and who promised to speak to the West Bank directors about Winston. Winston's efforts had never met with much success, but he renewed them occasionally because he realized that Farrell was having a bad time of it in India.

"I'm going to try to get in some shooting over the long weekend," said Winston. "Come along?"

Farrell shook his head slowly.

"I've got a rotten fever coming on," he said. "My ears are ringing like Big Ben with all the quinine I've taken. Think I'll stay in bed and break it up."

Winston shrugged. He had an idea that if the Calcutta race meeting were on, Farrell would forget his fever. Horse racing was Farrell's one interest since he had been at the mill.

"I want to ask you," said Farrell after a moment. "How about paying off, if you're closing for the *pūja*? Going to pay before Holi?"

"After," said Winston. "The day is apt to be quieter then."

"But the payroll in in the safe, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"And that accountant chap who's coming over to audit the books? We'll be having him for an extra day, then," said Farrell.

"Pawser? Decidedly not," said Winston.

Gerald C. Pawser, who came to the West Bank Jute Mills twice a year on behalf of a firm of Calcutta auditors, always lived at one of the mill bungalows while completing his audit. His visit never aroused great enthusiasm, since he was generally considered too stiff and dignified to be of any entertainment value.

"No, Pawser won't be over until later," Winston said. "I've sent him a chit to head him off. Gundranesh Dutt is taking it over to Calcutta tonight."

Gundranesh Dutt had every intention of going to Calcutta that night to deliver Mr. Winston's chit to Gerald C. Pawser. He was not going to a meeting of the Bengali Society for the Translation of Thackeray into Vernacular Idioms, for the simple reason that the society of which he spoke so fluently to Mr. Winston did not exist. It was not entirely an invention of Gundranesh Dutt, as plans for the organization of such a society had been discussed almost weekly by Dutt and his friend Bannerji, who, unlike Dutt, had managed to get into Calcutta University on his third attempt. The two decided that when the Thackeray society came into being, Bannerji should be president and Dutt secretary, but somehow the organizers had been too busy talking about the thing to get around to actual organization.

Nevertheless, Gundranesh Dutt put Winston's chit into his pocket and started out for Calcutta. He got halfway to the landing stage of the infrequent ferry, then stopped in joyous surprise, for coming up the road he saw Cousin Danilal Dutt from Barrackpore. Cousin Danilal owned a shop near the cantonment at Barrackpore and was fairly prosperous. He was taking a week's holiday, he said, to attend a wedding in Midnapur, and consequently would stay a few days with his cousin Gundranesh en route.

Gundranesh Dutt was delighted, for Cousin Danilal was a great fellow. He was as small and wiry as Gundranesh was rotund, and he had a bulging forehead that seemed too large for his narrow shoulders. But, though he wore a sad, scraggly Gandhi mustache and severe, steel rimmed spectacles, he was the very essence of fun. After a vociferous greeting in Urdu, English and Bengali, Gundranesh Dutt took his cousin's hand and accompanied him back to the house.

Squatting on padded mats in the swept mud courtyard of the little hut Gun-

dranesh Dutt occupied with his nineteen-year-old wife and three children, the two cousins talked until nearly midnight. They spoke English, largely to impress Mrs. Gundranesh Dutt, who hovered in the background on the side of the court formed by the women-and-children part of the house, and a dozen neighbors who had been sent for to join in welcoming the visitor. They sat about a smoky lamp, puffing leafy native cigarets. They chewed *pan* made with a very fine quality of shell-lime and *areca* nut brought by Cousin Danilal, and munched *mithai*, also brought by Cousin Danilal.

But the greatest attraction produced by Cousin Danilal from his cloth wrapped baggage was a pair of insecticide sprays.

"I am bringing same for celebration of Holi," said Cousin Danilal. "This one I am making present to you."

Gundranesh Dutt was overjoyed. He voiced loud thanks, while working the piston handle and feeling the stream of air blown against his cheek by the tiny nozzle.

"Same are imported from America," continued Cousin Danilal. "I am selling many just now in my shop. Are very popular for slaughtering insects and such-like. Should be equally suitable for spraying red powder for Holi, don't you think?"

Gundranesh Dutt thought so. So did his envious friends, many of whom would have to honor Krishna by throwing red powder with their hands, a primitive method antedating the British *raj* and the machine age.

It was not until the conversation had become political, and discussion of communal representation led to a general condemnation of all Moslems, that Gundranesh Dutt remembered the Thackeray Society and Mr. Winston's chit. Excusing himself, he rushed out of the house. He would just have time to make the last ferry. He was puffing down the road in panic when he met an Ooria coolie boy who worked at the mill.

"Here, *chokra!*" he called. "Here is ferry fare and four annas for your trouble. Take this chit to Calcutta. Ask any sahib

to direct you to the address, since you can not read. Run."

The boy ran until he thought he was out of sight. Then he walked to the nearest *mithai-walla* and spent the ferry fare on sweets and cigarets, intending to walk to Calcutta across the Howrah bridge. When he got to the bridge, however, he found it had been opened to allow river shipping to pass. So he threw away the chit and went home.



THE spray gun Cousin Danilal had brought from Barrackpore worked to perfection. It threw a lovely vermilion stream for several feet, and was fairly accurate in aim. With it Gundranesh Dutt spattered red over numerous friends and strangers. He and Cousin Danilal and two neighbors walked about all day, hand in hand, singing, pausing frequently to ambush passersby. They kept to the roads back of the coolie lines, and moved in a general southerly direction toward Howrah. Without thinking of it consciously, the *babu* instinctively avoided the mill compound. He knew that Winston was away, that Gregor and McKenn, the two mechanical superintendents, were in Calcutta, and that Henry Farrell was in bed with fever. His celebration of Holi in hearty Bengali fashion would be unseen by those who mattered. Yet in the mill compound Gundranesh Dutt felt almost a sahib, and with a red smeared insect gun in his hands, he was not feeling at all the sahib.

At the end of the afternoon, however, when the carnival spirit began to lag and the supply of red powder ran low, the two cousins drifted back toward the mill. Then it was that Gundranesh Dutt decided to show off for Cousin Danilal. He would take his cousin past the office and invent some excuse for going in—just to impress Cousin Danilal with the fact that he had a key.

It was almost dark when the *babu* and his cousin approached the mill compound. The place was nearly deserted. A few Hindus in red spattered tunics and *dhotis* passed them, but were too tired to do

further honor to Krishna. Suddenly, walking in the rear of the mill building, Gundranesh Dutt seized his cousin's arm and drew him behind a projecting corner.

"Have just now seen man dodging into doorway," he whispered. "Probably Delaideira, skinny Eurasian in cashier department, seeking avoidance of soiling clothes. I quite despise such snobbish fellows. Let us creep and surround him."

Stealthily, with insect guns poised in readiness, the two Hindus approached the doorway. Standing close to the wall, they halted. The *babu* nudged his cousin, and the two men pounced, shouting, pumping vermilion toward the figure crouched in the doorway.

Then they stopped, aghast. The crouching figure had suddenly unfolded into a man of no ordinary height, from whose lips poured a molten stream of white hot English invective. A bundle dropped from under one arm.

"Mr. Farrell!" exclaimed Gundranesh Dutt in abject terror, when he had caught his breath. "So horribly sorry for this happening!"

"Ruddy swine!" muttered Farrell, glaring at the *babu* who attempted to brush the red powder from the assistant manager's clothes. Farrell snatched the spray guns from unresisting hands.

"So horribly sorry," the *babu* repeated. "You are last man in cosmogony I could expect to encounter. Was laboring under mistaken impression that you were confined, sir, with malarial fevers. This is my Cousin Danilal Dutt of Barrackpore, sir, who was just now showing me functionment of new style American insect destroyers—very efficacious, sir, as perhaps you have been observing . . ."

The scowl faded from Henry Farrell's lean face. He stopped swearing. Something like a smile appeared.

"Listen, *babu*," he said deliberately. He watched Gundranesh Dutt's expression. No *babu* likes to be addressed as *babu* by Europeans. "Listen, *babu*. Where will you be if the *burra sahib* hears about this?"

"Horribly sorry, Mr. Farrell."

With an abrupt movement, Farrell

handed the two spray guns to the Bengalis.

"You're not a bad *babu*, Dutt," he said. "I wouldn't want you to get the sack on my account. So we'll forget this little incident. As far as you're concerned, you didn't see me; I've been ill in bed all day. As far as I'm concerned, I didn't see you making an ass of yourself. Is it a *bundo-bust*?"

Farrell extended his hand. Gundranesh Dutt wrung it gratefully.

"You are splendid fellow," he said.

Then he hurried home before anything else could happen. He forgot all about the matter as he and Cousin Danilal began paring *areca* nut for the evening's *pan* chewing.

Gundranesh Dutt's house was far enough from the mill so that he did not hear the hue and cry raised in the compound some half hour later. The *durwan* on duty at the front gate of the compound heard the noise, however. He could not help hearing it, since the mill building suddenly seemed to be peopled with a dozen shouting Englishman and abusive Hindus.

The voices startled the *durwan*, since he knew that all doors to the mill were locked. He listened at one door behind which he had heard pounding and shouting. The pounding and shouting were now coming from another door. Then began a violent tattoo on still a third door, and the yells, which had been unintelligible English words, burst into brilliant Hindustani imprecations. The *durwan* got a lantern and stood on an empty box, so that he could peer through a small, high window into the darkened mill. He uttered surprised clucking sounds into his beard at the apparition which greeted his eyes.

Dodging in and out among the rows of silent looms was the tall white figure of a dignified Englishman—naked except for a strip of burlap with which he had tried to clothe himself, with indifferent success. The naked man had a bristling gray mustache and more a monocle. His steel gray hair was in disarray, and he ap-

peared slightly out of his mind as he dashed about, waving his arms and shouting.



THE *durwan* lowered his lantern, jumped off his box and ran for help. An insane sahib was clearly beyond his jurisdiction, and he would not take the responsibility alone. He ran to the bungalow of Gregor and McKenn, but the engineers had not yet returned. He called for Winston, but the bearer said the *burra sahib* was still away. He told his excited story to Henry Farrell, but Farrell was in bed with the fever and said he was too sick to get up. Farrell suggested sending for the police.

The *durwan* had just started down the road in search of a policeman when he met Ralph Winston walking up from the landing stage. Stammering and somewhat incoherent, he told Winston his story of the apparition in the mill.

Flashlight in hand, Winston accompanied the *durwan* to the compound, unlocked the main entrance to the mill building, and stepped inside. He heard none of the strange noises the *durwan* had described. Silence hung on the darkness. The beam of his flashlight disclosed nothing. He cried—

"Anybody there?"

"Yes, damn it all," came a precise English voice. "Get me some clothes, will you please?"

Winston walked toward the voice. His light fell upon a figure trying to hide behind a loom. Winston's face cracked into a smile, hidden by the kindly darkness.

"Hello, Mr. Pawser," he said. "What are you doing here? Didn't you get my chit asking you not to come over today?"

"I say, *can't* you get me some clothes?" demanded the naked Pawser. His lips were white. His voice was choked with indignation. The reflection of Winston's flashlight glittered on his monocle, as his head shook.

Winston sent for a dressing gown, dispersed the crowd of curious Indians about the mill door and escorted the outraged

auditor to his own bungalow. It took two stiff brandy pegs and considerable conciliatory talk by Winston before Gerald C. Pawser, dressed in a suit of Winston's whites—which were too small for him—had gained sufficient calm to tell what had happened.

In the first place, he had not received Ralph Winston's chit. He had come today as originally planned. It was only in crossing the compound that he noticed that a holiday had been declared.

"I went directly to the office," said Pawser. "I supposed that one of the European staff would be there. The door was open, so I went in. I thought I heard some one moving about. I saw no one, but I noticed that the door to the safe was slightly ajar. I started toward the safe when I was struck a terrific blow on the head. Who or what struck me, I have no idea. The blow came from behind and I lost consciousness immediately. When I came to, I was in your mill, it was dark—and I was naked. You can imagine my mortification."

Yes, Winston could imagine Pawser's mortification. Even if he had not seen him, it would have been easy to picture the tall, painfully dignified auditor stalking about the empty mill, stark naked except for his monocle which by some miracle he had retained clamped in his right eye.

Pawser flushed as he told of his humiliation in finding all the doors fastened, of seeing a Sikh with a lantern at the window, of waiting "ages" before his release.

"A most shameful and extraordinary business," he said. "Why should any one want to make off with my clothes? Why should any one want to strike me and lock me up? I can see no rhyme nor reason to the thing."

"I think I can," said Winston. "Come over with me while we have a look at that safe you said was open."

"I didn't say 'open,'" said Pawser. "I said 'slightly ajar'."

Winston walked rapidly from his bungalow to his office. He was thinking of the payroll in the safe.

"I thought you said the office door was open," he said, fishing a bunch of keys from his pocket.

"It was."

"It's locked now."

Winston unlocked it. He walked to the safe and tried the steel handle. The safe, too, was locked.

"I swear it was slightly ajar," said Pawser. "But it's closed."

"Naturally," said Winston, twirling the combination dial. "Whoever hit you closed the safe before he left."

Winston swung the steel door open and took out two metal cash boxes. He opened them and counted bundles of twenty-rupee notes, ten-rupee notes, and booklets of one-rupee notes, perforated and ready to tear out like commutation tickets.

"Nothing missing," he announced.

"Then you think I was attacked by a thief?"

"You arrived in time to keep him from becoming one."

"But what could he have done with my clothes?"

"We'll find out," said Winston.



HE MADE searchers of Gregor and McKenn, who had just come weaving back from Calcutta, singing "You tak' the high road . . ." He tried to make a searcher of Farrell, but Farrell was too ill. He mobilized his staff of Sikh watchmen, and gave instructions for the hunt.

Two hours later the auditor's clothes had been found, twisted into a red smeared bundle, behind the hut occupied by Gundranesh Dutt.

"Apparently one of these silly native pranks," said Gerald C. Pawser. "Some misguided way of celebrating Holi, I suppose."

Winston said nothing. He questioned the *durwans* first. Then he questioned the Europeans. Gregor and McKenn were quite talkative—so talkative, in fact, that Winston was quite prepared to accept their story of a bibulous evening in Calcutta. Farrell was far from talkative. He

mumbled something about leaving a sick man in peace.

Winston walked about nervously as he questioned his assistant. He noted smudges of red on the cement floor of Farrell's bungalow.

"Why don't you get the police and be done with it?" grumbled Farrell. "This business is more in their line than yours."

"I'd like to made my own investigation first," said Winston. "I'd like to avoid any unpleasantness I can."

"Can't see any reason for taking kid gloves to this business," Farrell continued. "It's plainly some native gone mad with the hang-all idea they get on Holi. If we had a man as viceroy instead of a stuffed shirt, we wouldn't allow any Holi celebrations."

"The office door being open when Mr. Pawser arrived doesn't quite bear out the native prank theory," said Winston.

Winston stopped pacing to look at the man in bed. The mosquito bar was down and he could not see Farrell's face very well.

"Why not?" asked Farrell. "There are natives with keys to the office. How about that *babu*—Gundranesh Dutt?"

"Isn't that the chap near whose house we found the clothes?" Gerald Pawser inquired.

Winston nodded.

"Why not let the police sweat the truth out of him?"

"I'll speak to him myself," said Winston.

But it was not until noon next day that Winston questioned Gundranesh Dutt. In the meantime, two developments unfolded. First, Gerald C. Pawser, the wound to his dignity gaining importance as the bump on the top of his head swelled and throbbed, decided that the affront was not receiving the attention it deserved; he called the Howrah police. Second, Gerald C. Pawser, when told by Winston to go ahead with the audit and leave the investigation to others, discovered some disconcerting things in the books of the West Bank Jute Mills. In a few hours he had found a glaring discrepancy of 13,000

rupees in the mill accounts. Efforts had been made to juggle the figures to cover up the shortage. Pawser found erasures and false entries. He suggested questioning the *babu* in charge of the books. What was his name? Gundranesh Dutt—

"It's an open and shut case," said Inspector Montague of the Howrah police, when he heard Pawser's announcement. The *babu* was guilty, according to the inspector. Because of the holiday, he thought he could return to the office unobserved. He had a key. Perhaps he intended to get into the payroll which he knew was in the safe. Perhaps he came merely to do a little extra work on disguising the figures before the arrival of the auditor. The obvious way out was to render Mr. Pawser unconscious before detection, lock him in the mill and remove his clothes to hinder immediate pursuit. The matter was quite plain to Inspector Montague, who confronted the *babu* with the evidence in the presence of Winston and Pawser. Farrell was still in bed.

"Where were you yesterday, Dutt?"

"In Calcutta, sir, reading Thackeray in headquarters of society to which I am secretary."

"How long were you gone from the mill?"

"All day, sir. Until quite late in evening time."

"It happens that several witnesses saw you on this side of the river—on the Howrah trunk road, and in the mill compound."

Gundranesh Dutt wagged his head.

"Witnesses were perhaps mistaking some other Hindu gentleman."

"They seem quite positive. They saw you and another Bengali walking about with syringes, throwing red powder on people."

"Preposterous!" exclaimed Gundranesh Dutt in high indignation—and was immediately convinced that the story was indeed preposterous. He was now wearing his celluloid collar and European clothes, and his Bengali ego was a thing non-existent. "Preposterous! Mr. Winston knows I have greatest distaste and hos-

tility for all such native pranks. He knows I would be going to Calcutta to avoid such uncivilizing red powder squirting."

"Obviously he's lying," said Pawser.

"What have you done with the money?" demanded Inspector Montague suddenly. "Where are the thirteen thousand rupees?"

"What rupees?" The *babu* was on his feet, terrified. Perspiration made nervous beads on his forehead. His brown moon-face was wet. "What is this, Mr. Winston? What money are they mentioning?"



TURNING in panic from the glower of the police officer to the quiet, thoughtful stare of Ralph Winston, the *babu* appeared particularly squat and helpless. He must have been two feet shorter than the tall, gaunt Pawser. Winston leaned forward slightly, as though he had just thought of something. His eyes compared Gundranesh Dutt and Gerald Pawser.

"I'll lock him up," Montague was saying. "Then he'll talk."

"What for?" demanded the *babu*, wide eyed. "What for, Mr. Winston? Tell them I am quite law abiding with wife and three small children but no sympathies for *swarajists*!"

"I wish you'd leave him here," Winston interposed. "At least until we see what the audit finally shows."

"He'd skip in a minute," said Inspector Montague.

"I'll vouch for him," said Winston. "Give me twenty-four hours. You can lock him up tomorrow if I don't straighten things out by then."

"And my head?" asked Pawser, looking offended.

"Your head is the very thing I'm thinking of," said Winston.

Montague left, reluctantly. Pawser went back to his books, and Winston took Gundranesh Dutt, very grateful and still perspiring, into his private office.

"Dutt," said Winston, cutting into the *babu's* profuse expression of thanks, "did you see Mr. Farrell about the mill compound yesterday?"

"I was not about yesterday," said

Gundranesh Dutt uneasily. "On Holi I—"

"Listen, Dutt," interrupted Winston with a knowing smile, "try to keep to facts. We won't go into what became of the chit I asked you to deliver. It's obvious to me that you turned it over to some coolie, and the coolie threw it away. I won't ask you to think up any elaborate explanations for that. But this other matter is serious. The police accuse you of stealing thirteen thousand rupees, altering your accounts, and attacking the auditor. I should like to help you clear yourself if you are innocent. You are sure you did not see Mr. Farrell?"

Gundranesh Dutt closed his eyes for a moment. The whole miserable scene of Mr. Farrell being squirted with red powder arose before him. If he told of seeing Mr. Farrell, then Mr. Farrell would tell of his celebrating Holi like a common mill hand! This accusation of theft and assault was false, and consequently not serious. But the business of the red powder was very real and very shameful. . . . The *babu* opened his eyes.

"I can not recall seeing Mr. Farrell," he said.

"You didn't see him—or any one else—prowl about your house early in the evening?"

"No, sir."

"You have no idea how Mr. Pawser's clothes came to be found back of your house?"

"Not remotest idea."

Winston shook his head.

"In case you should hear anything—or remember anything—tell me at once," said Winston. "And of course I can depend upon you to stay in the vicinity."

"To utmost," said Gundranesh Dutt.

Ten minutes later Winston was at the bedside of Henry Farrell.

"How do you feel?" he asked.

"I'm burning up," said Farrell.

"Better let me take your temperature," said Winston.

"Haven't a thermometer."

"I have," said Winston. "I'll send for it."

"Don't trouble."

"No trouble." Winston sat down. He

saw something gleam under the bed. It appeared to be a bottle, empty, because it was lying on its side. "No trouble at all. In fact, I'm damned anxious to take your temperature."

Farrell raised himself on one elbow.

"What are you driving at?" he demanded.

"You haven't a degree of temperature," said Winston.

Farrell held out his hand.

"Feel my pulse. It's running away with me."

"That's not fever," said Winston without moving. "Your breath, not your pulse, tells the story." He looked his assistant squarely in the eyes. "Farrell, you told me you didn't leave your bungalow all day yesterday. Yet there were tracks and smudges of red Holi powder on your floor last night."

"Not surprising," said Farrell. "The bearer, the cook, the sweeper, the *bhisti* and a *durwan* or two were in and out all day. Small wonder they tracked up the place with red on Holi. Seems simple enough."

"It would be simple," said Winston, if it weren't for the fact that none of your servants wear shoes. Neither does the *bhisti* or any of the *durwans*. Yet the red tracks on your floor last night were definite imprints of a shoe, with a rubber heel—such as you wear."

"Well?"

"You have a key to the office, Farrell, and you know the combination to the safe."

"So does Dutt."

"But Dutt could not have struck Gerald Pawser from behind and raised a lump on the particular part of the top of his head that the auditor is nursing. It happens that Dutt is quite short, and Pawser is quite tall. The man who struck Pawser must have been a tall man—like you, Farrell."

Farrell sat up suddenly and swung his legs over the edge of the bed. His malaria was cured in a flash.

"Are you calling me a thief?" he demanded hoarsely.

"That's exactly what I should be calling you," Winston replied, "if you didn't happen to be a cousin of mine. As it is, I'm merely giving you a chance to explain what you know about those thirteen thousand rupees."

"There's nothing to explain."

"Perhaps there isn't, after all," said Winston, "since I already know that you dropped seven thousand dibs at the Barrackpore race meeting, six thousand at the monsoon meeting, and something like five or six thousand more at the cold weather meeting in Calcutta."

"That's a lie! Who's been spreading lies like that about me?"

"I've been talking to your bookmaker."

Farrell's upper lip curled slightly.

"Been spying on me, have you? Pleasant little habit."

"I've been trying to help you out of what looks to be a bad mess."

"Helping me, eh?" Farrell was on his feet, his long fingers curling slowly. "Going to send me to prison for my own good, eh? You—"

In two steps he was standing over Winston, his chin tight against his chest as he glared down at him, his hands raised as though to strangle him. Winston did not move.

"Wait until I've finished, Farrell," said Winston calmly. "I don't want to send you up, although it might do you good. I can understand what happens to a fellow with a wobbly spine when he gets fed up with India. But people at home can't. And because you happened to be a relative, your father will blame me for letting you go to the dogs. So I'm going to give you a chance to pull yourself out of this. If you'll make good the thirteen thousand, the matter will be dropped."

Farrell placed his hands slowly on his hips. He still stood glowering above Winston.

"I haven't said I took any thirteen thousand," he declared sullenly. "And if I had—where'd I get the money to pay back? I owe my bookie three thousand that'll have to be paid by next settling

day if I'm not to be blacklisted. And I haven't a *pie* to my name."

"I know you haven't," said Winston. "Here's my plan. I'll lend you five thousand rupees—cash. It can turn up somewhere tomorrow to throw the auditor off. He'll have to recheck the whole show. In the meantime you can get the rest from a bank. I'll go on your note."

"And how am I to repay you and the bank?"

"By working. It will mean that you won't go home next year, that's all. You'll have to sign for another two years. I'll take care of the debt quietly, out of your salary."



WITH an animal-like grunt, Farrell whirled, strode across the room, came back, stopped, and shouted something in Hindustani. A bearer appeared with a glass and a bottle on a tray. Farrell poured himself a tumbler full of whisky, dismissed the bearer, and swallowed the liquor without a breath. He stood a moment staring at Winston. Then he hurled the empty glass across the room. It smashed against the wall. A lizard scampered over the ceiling in panic.

"I'll be damned if I'll stay three more years in this rotten hole!" exclaimed Farrell fiercely. "I'd kill myself first!"

Winston stood up.

"Suit yourself," he said. "I thought you'd rather spend the time at the mill than in prison. That's all."

He turned to go. Farrell caught his sleeve.

"Wait. There's some trick back of all this generosity of yours." "

"No trick," said Winston. "It's just your luck that I happen to have five thousand rupees in cash in my bungalow. I was on the point of buying a motor launch from a Naihati Mohammedan who doesn't understand banks and checks—that's all."

Farrell sat down. His face was flushed. His eyes, half closed, seemed to be watching something a great distance off.

"Sorry I flew off the handle," he said.

"I—you know how I hate this stinking place. But I—I think I'll accept your offer. Give me tonight to think it over."

"You can't put it off too long," said Winston. "Remember I've got to arrange to plant that money somewhere."

"You'll know by *chota hazri* in the morning," said Farrell.

Late that night Gundranesh Dutt was helping Cousin Danilal prepare to resume his journey to Midnapur for the wedding. While wrapping his packages with large squares of cloth, Cousin Danilal said:

"If you are having no objections, I will repossess American spray guns, same having served for Holi, restoring them to original insect purposes. I will take same to Midnapur for wedding present, as I have understanding that mosquitoes Midnapur-side are quite considerable menace. If you have household insects present, I will be glad to demonstrate method of slaughter, as I have here small tin containing fatal fluid."

The demonstration was in progress, with both guns in full operation, when the door to Gundranesh Dutt's shack burst open.

Henry Farrell lurched in, looked about him, then slammed the door and leaned back against it. He said nothing for several seconds. His breath was quick and audible. He was hatless, and his hair hung over his forehead. A long scratch crossed his cheek, and there was an irregular smear of blood on his drill coat. His shirt was torn in front. He was quite drunk. There was the look of a hunted creature in his eyes.

"Listen, you—" he pointed suddenly to Gundranesh Dutt. "Run and get me a taxi. Get one up Howrah way. Be damned quick about it!"

"Gladly, Mr. Farrell," said the *babu*, suddenly relieved. "You are going somewhere?"

"None of your damned business where I'm going!" snapped Farrell. "You get the taxi, that's all. *Ek dom!*"

"Come along?" asked Gundranesh Dutt of Cousin Danilal, who was replacing

the insect guns in his cloth packages. Cousin Danilal nodded in assent.

"And listen, you!" Farrel approached Gundranesh Dutt and abruptly poked the muzzle of a revolver into his ample stomach. "I'm going to stay right here, but you don't know where I am, *janta?* You haven't seen me tonight, *janta?* As soon as you bring the taxi back here, you've forgotten all about it, *janta?* All right, then, *chel aol!*"

Gundranesh Dutt didn't like Farrell's injection of Hindustani words into his conversation; they made him feel inferior. But he did not complain. The pressure of the revolver against his midriff puzzled him. He said, "Returning directly, Mr. Farrell, sir," and left the house with Cousin Danilal.

Once outside, Cousin Danilal said:

"I was noticing that European gentleman has weapons for *shikari*. What hunting is there this side at night time?"

"Jackals," said Gundranesh Dutt. "European gentlemen sometimes shoot jackals near here when in destructive mood. But what luck regarding taxi! We can use same for escorting you to Howrah station before I am returning with it."

"We have plenty time," said Cousin Danilal, glancing at a thick nicked watch that hung around his neck on a string.

The two Bengalis walked leisurely along the road, picking up a rickety taxi at some indeterminate time later, in the outskirts of Howrah. They proceeded without haste to Howrah station, and were mildly surprised to find that Cousin Danilal's train had gone some twenty minutes before.

"Am constantly forgetting that railway time is different than Calcutta time," said Cousin Danilal, re-setting his watch. "No matter. Another train will leave for Midnapur side in only five hours. It is mixed passenger train instead of mail train, but no matter."

"You will, of course, return to us in meanwhile?"

"Of course," said Cousin Danilal, unperturbed by the thought of the wait.



THE moment the taxi drew up in front of Gundranesh Dutt's shack, Henry Farrell rushed out. Swearing furiously in English and Hindustani, he tried to push his way past the portly *babu* who was calmly getting out of the taxi.

"Damned filthy *babu*!" he muttered. "I said hurry, didn't I? Can't understand English, ruddy *jungli-wallal*!"

"He called you *jungli-wallal*!" exclaimed Cousin Danilal. "Do you stand for such things?"

"Please, Mr. Farrell," Gundranesh Dutt protested.

"Clear out," cried Farrell drunkenly, pushing his fist into the *babu's* protruding stomach. "*Diwani-ka-bacha*, that's what you are! Ruddy stinking nigger!"

"You can't strike me, Mr. Farrell." The *babu* was resisting, stung by Farrell's abuse more than by his punches. When a man feels almost a *sahib*, nobody can call him "nigger".

"Oh, I can't strike you, can't I? I'll show you." And Farrell began the demonstration at once.

Gundranesh Dutt sat down abruptly under a shower of blows. He landed on Cousin Danilal's cloth tied baggage. He felt the piston handle of one of Danilal's spray guns sticking him in the nether quarters. Lowering his head against Farrell's attack, he raised one thigh and extracted the spray gun. Swinging it to the front, he began pumping it wildly. The spray of insecticide billowed into Farrell's contorted face. He stepped back, gasping, rubbing his eyes frantically.

Gundranesh Dutt continued spraying. The oily droplets fell into Farrell's open mouth. He coughed violently. The *babu* pumped on.

Blinded, choking, struggling and wheezing for breath, Farrell backed, stumbled, turned half around, butted unseeing into the wall of the *babu's* house, staggered in a new direction.

Gundranesh Dutt sprang from the taxi, and gave the tottering Farrell a push. Farrell fell headlong through the open door into the *babu's* house. As he went down, his hand was tugging at something in his pocket. He raised himself on one knee. Desperately, clumsily, he yanked his revolver into action. A flutter of banknotes of large denominations accompanied the appearance of the gun.

He fired blindly. The shot roared harmlessly into the wall.

Gundranesh Dutt stared at the money that had burst from Farrell's pocket. Then he renewed his barrage of insecticide. Farrell crossed his arms in front of his face to protect his smarting eyes from further agony.

Cousin Danilal snatched the revolver from Farrell's hand. Gundranesh Dutt stopped spraying, dragged Cousin Danilal from the house, slammed the door and locked it on Farrell.

"Quite suspicious happenings," he said to Cousin Danilal. "Must report same to *burra sahib*. You will do great favor by entering through women-and-children side of house and locking other door. Perhaps you should also conceal both guns, mosquito and otherwise."

He paused to listen to enraged, animal-like sounds within the hut. Half intelligible words were bellowed between grunts, things were being knocked over, the door trembled under a storm of kicks and blows.

"European gentleman seems desirous of coming out," said Cousin Danilal.

"Reconsidering, perhaps revolver gun had better remain in evidence," said Gundranesh Dutt. "Please be sentry while I lock backside door myself."

As the *babu* was performing his task, he heard earthenware *chattis* being smashed against the wall. He hurried puffing around to the front, just as a brass pot came crashing through a tiny window high in the wall. Farrell's head appeared in the opening.

"What luck," exclaimed the *babu*, "that mine is not *pukka*-built house!"

Small size windows are greatest help to extemporaneous prison!"

Cursing and threatening, Farrell demanded to be released.

"Mr. Farrell, you are violating laws of British India forbidding destruction of private property!" declared Gundranesh.

"Please observe we are forewarned and forearmed!" cried Cousin Danilal, brandishing Farrell's revolver.

He had grasped the weapon awkwardly, gingerly, but was waving it boldly, just as though it were not the first pistol he had ever held. He tightened his hold. Suddenly the gun discharged a spurt of thunderous flame. Cousin Danilal wilted. The shot carried away a tile on the roof. Farrell disappeared from the window. He continued cursing inside.

Recovering instantly from his surprise and alarm, Cousin Danilal was highly pleased with having successfully, if unintentionally, fired a warning shot. He began shouting at Farrell, who could be heard smashing Gundranesh Dutt's few rickety sticks of furniture against the door. A crowd of mill coolies was gathering. Gundranesh Dutt hurried on his mission to report to his manager.

The *babu* found Ralph Winston's bungalow in a state of disorder and excitement. Bewildered servants were trying to straighten up the front room, in which chairs had been broken, a chest of drawers overturned and the contents strewn about the floor, a trunk ransacked and emptied. In another room the *babu* found Gregor and McKenn bending over a bed on which lay stretched the inert form of Ralph Winston.

"My bearer woke me ten minutes ago to tell me he heard groans over here," said Gregor. "The chief hasn't gained consciousness yet, but he seems to be alive. We've sent for a doctor."

Winston's lips parted and he swallowed some brandy. After a moment, he uttered faint cackling sounds. He was laughing, weakly, ironically.

"This is what comes of carrying a snake in your pocket," he murmured. "Farrell robbed the mill. I tried to help him, for

the family's sake. So he robbed me. And when I caught him, he beat me silly with the barrel of a revolver. Nice of him not to kill me . . . By this time he must be on his way to Bombay with my money."

"Not yet," interrupted Gundranesh Dutt. "Mr. Farrell has changed plans. For moment he is resting in my house."

Winston raised his head.

"Get over there, some one," he said weakly. "Farrell's a thief. Head him off! Lock him up!"

"He is already locked," said the *babu* proudly, "to prevent further change of plans with undue suddenness."

"Come on, Gregor," said McKenn. "Dutt can stay here until the doctor comes. We'd better get over and hold Farrell for the police."

"You will find Mr. Farrell conversing with my Cousin Danilal Dutt of Barrackpore," the *babu* called after the two engineers.

Five minutes later Gregor, McKenn and two European constables from Howrah brought the sullen and subdued Farrell to Winston's bungalow. They said they had found him trying to escape through a hole he had made in the roof by dislodging tiles. He refused to talk. Gundranesh Dutt, however, talked readily enough. He had told Winston his story before the police had produced Farrell.

"Good boy, Dutt," Winston had said, as soon as he was left alone with the *babu*. "How did you manage to capture him?"

Gundranesh Dutt hesitated. Now that he thought of it, his conquest of Henry Farrell with an insect spray was not a very dignified operation. That is not the way a Britisher would have done it. Besides, the business of the spray gun was a little too closely connected with his reversion to old Hindu customs on Holi.

"All done by reasoning," explained Gundranesh Dutt. "I said, 'Mr. Farrell, if you will take my advice, why are you running away like ruddy *jungli-walla*? Why are you not trying to perform like *sahib*?' "

Winston smiled.

NORTHWARD Ho!

By F. ST. MARS



THE picture was in two halves—the sky above and bottle-green sea below, and to finish it off a silver gull floated between the two. There was no land.

The silver gull was watching a tiny dark object twiddling in the water. He thought it was a fish in trouble or something, and settled to see. Then the tiny dark object vanished and, without a breath of sound, huge jaws shut with a metallic snap upon the gull's webbed and paddling feet from below, and he vanished utterly and forever with one last terrified yell, down into those jaws. Swallowed whole, he was, feathers, flapping wings, and all, at one gulp. But it was a fear-some end, all alone there upon the face of the father of all the oceans, without a living thing in sight to pity him.

Nothing happened after that for a bit, till presently the little dark object appeared upon the surface again, twiddled for a space, came to the conclusion there were no more feathered fools about, rose bodily, huge and dripping, and turned into an enormous beast—not a fish—

eight feet long, seven feet round; and fat as a pudding at that—and weighing about eight hundred pounds. It rolled its mighty, dirty gray bulk in the trough of the waves, that brute, and it roared and—What's that? Sea lion? No, sirs. Grant seal then? No again. But a link between the two. In fact, a full grown, full blossomed male sea bear in the zenith of his day.

Never heard of such a one? Possibly, but you have no doubt seen sealskin coats and muffs and things in the furriers and upon the backs of the fair. Very well, then, you've seen his skin, or the hide of his species anyway. Fur seals, they call 'em, those who go down to the sea in boats to slay them; but they are not true or earless seals, all the same; not the seal you probably thought; not the smooth, gentle eyed creature of the aquarium, and the circus; not, in fact, the same tribe at all, and very strange creatures too, and already scarcer than they should be.

You knew him, one of a little party of five, this huge sea bear, as he turned his nose and began to swim steadily and at

wonderful speed northward, by his very short face; by his humped immense shoulders; by his peculiar and long narrow hind flippers, neither always turned back on land like a seal's, nor forward like an eared sea lion's; and when on land by his upright carriage, and quicker gait—about six miles in twenty-four hours, against the sea lion's short two! Altogether, you will admit that our sea bear was an odd beast, and not lightly to be tampered with.

But if there was one thing more than another in which the sea bear was peculiar, it was his amazing speed in the water. As he headed steadily northward, sometimes alternately appearing and vanishing as he cut through the long rollers, sometimes merely a short broad head cutting a hissing white wedge of foam, sometimes going down and coming up in long, two-hundred yard gaps, the one point about him all the time that held the eye was his speed, speed, and again *speed*. And never for an instant did he stop. That was perhaps the other point about him, his eternal and uncanny restless motion.

Night added itself to the utter, utter loneliness of the scene, but never did Ursina—we will call him that, since even a sea bear may have a name—never, I say, did he stop. And scarcely ever did he change the direction of his northward course.

Times there were, truly, when he moved about the ocean even a little faster than he was now going—though it scarcely seemed possible—to fish. To pursue the great silver sided Flintook salmon, I think, and once to haul up by his tail from unknown depths a fourteen-pound thing looking like a rod, and many times to chop at smaller fish in the passing.

Once also, after the golden dawn had magicked the sea to lavender, ruby, gilt and finally amber, Ursina sought breakfast below. Here in the utterly still, endless green fog of the silent underworld, you must picture him no longer as a big fur seal, but as an immense, nebulous, pear shaped bubble, silver flecked where the top light touched him, going down and down ahead of a comet-like trail that was

his own bubbles, in pursuit of another, but far smaller, greenish nebulous bubble that was a forty-pound—more or less—sock-eye salmon; while flashes here and there and showers of sparks represented single fishes big, and shoals of fishes small, turning over to the light as they swerved out of Ursina's way.

The salmon, "sounding" as a forlorn hope, that is boring straight down—in spite of the pressure of those two or three thousand fathoms—came back in his face, nearly knocking him silly—and Ursina fled with the tentacles of a cuttlefish, flung up from the uttermost pitch dark depths by heaven knows what trouble, waving after his tail.

And after that he continued his way, perilous as the way of an explorer in darkest Africa, but always, always holding to his line, or coming back to it, hour in, hour out, day in, night out, in spite of the fourteen-foot killer whale—or his knife blade back fin, rather—who would have chopped him into two quivering halves if his marvelous agility in the water had not avoided the slower beast's rush. In spite of the liner racing through the fog, at full speed of course, to deliver the mails, whose towering razor stem cut the water, hissing within two yards of his darting form, instead of cutting that darting form in two as it evidently meant to do. In spite of the Steller's sea lion apparently traveling in the same direction, who had lost an eye, from a fight presumably, and who seemed to want to make him pay for it, and rushed at him open mouthed, till after being fought off once, and dodged twice, the combatants nearly ran into an iceberg. This was inhabited by five gulls and a starving polar bear, who so nearly caught the one eyed Steller's sea lion that Ursina lost him.

And finally, but not least wonderfully, in spite of the fact that he had absolutely nothing at all to guide him in all that trackless waste of endless water but his own instinct, and possibly the feel of a few currents and the position of the sun.

There were, however, others there besides the hateful cold, and immaculate

black-and-white killer whales—whose tall, knife blade back fins were becoming too frequent, cutting athwart the long following waves, to be pleasant, and who were expecting Ursina and his company, or other companies like them.

At any rate, once from a whitened wave crest Ursina looked over a full mile of ocean, and caught sight of the tops of dipping, nodding, masts beyond, and—the man perched with telescope in one of those masts gave a yell which caused two little boats, each with three men, a rifle, and two shotguns, literally to tumble from the small ship owning the masts, and to race like mad things upon a course that would, if quick enough, intercept Ursina and his party, for—well, what would you?—Ursina was a sea bear, the seal of the soft inimitable under-fur, and the owner of the sealskin jacket of commerce.



URSINA, who was fishing his way along slowly for once, on that strange, smooth regular switchback of all the eared seals, appearing at the top of each upward curve upon the surface head first, and turning sidewise, displaying in rotation as the head swung under, the body, and as that vanished, the hind flippers with a final toss, became suddenly and alarmingly aware of the bows of a small boat sliding down the long smooth back of a wave almost upon him.

Ursina's fine, full quick eyes could see the man standing up in the bows, his arms raised in front; could catch the unmistakable bar-like gleam of the sinking sun along the raised rifle barrel; could distinguish clearly the wicked stab of flame that licked out and back therefrom; could hear the short, bitter report that followed, and could both feel by concussion, as well as by flash, and hear the .303 rifle bullet weighing two hundred and fifteen grains which hit the jade-green water so exactly in front of his own nose that the splash of it went into his eyes!

Another two inches nearer, a fraction of a flipper-thrust greater speed, a little less abruptness in his curve downward and—

oh, Ursina! lead-nosed death would have drilled clean through his brain.

As it was, it was Ursina who was drilling, through the water and low down, quivering, vibrating, shooting forward in one straight streaking silvered line, with such amazing momentum, like some globular, nebulous torpedo, that it seemed as if he could not be a thing of flesh and blood at all, but some man-made projectile hurled with untold muzzle velocity through the green fog of the watery underworld from a gigantic gun.

When Ursina did come up it was but to show his nose, and the top of his head, nearly half a mile away, but it was enough for him to hear a dull thud, which was the rifle speaking to another sea bear—for there were others in that scene, though Ursina may not have known it, all heading one way.

Ursina swam pretty fast for the rest of that night, and when he rose at dawn, as the wan east was lighting the wave tops with steel, and the dark hollows were paling to purple, it was to find a dank, humid fog abroad on the face of the water, shutting in everything.

But there was no need for that beast to see. Even if he could not have smelled the land—which he could—a steady unbroken, vast and arresting murmur, rising and falling upon the dead silence of all around, instantly undeceived him. It was like unto the murmur of a "great city awaiting the event" afar off, but it was not a great city all the same. No, sirs, Ursina knew that. You could see that he knew by the way he was steering straight toward it at the speed of knots, and with his usual switchback method of swimming in purposeful silence, the rest of his party, appearing and disappearing, trailed out behind him.

Ursina headed straight for that tumult, I say—and I guess he needed no other guide through the fog—as a racehorse makes for the winning post, and there was an air about his terrific speed, his impulsive, reckless haste, which seemed to suggest that he had at last reached his goal, was late and knew it.

Soon he fell among rocks, dripping and spouting in spray, and the sill gradually filled with swerving, curving sea diving, arriving, snorting shapes—sea bears going ashore.

Ursina could not wait to navigate this wonderful crowd. He was swiftly working himself up into an agony of expectation, the ultimate climax of that same longing and expectation which had brought him, mostly alone, across more than twenty thousand square miles of pathless, landless ocean to realize. And now that the thing itself was at hand, he was, I think, no longer a beast in control of himself at all, and nothing, I fancy, not even a gunshot point blank, would have stopped him.

He dived deep down under the big, gathering fur seals, and straight as a silver torpedo—and not unlike one when seen from above—he swam, as few beasts can swim, for the beach. Then the floor of the sea shelved upward, and he with it, till, roaring, splashing, foaming, he arrived, hurtling bodily ashore on the lap of a wave.

Then he stopped dead—and well he might.

The fog had lifted a bit, and he could see a good way over a rocky, shelving, pebbly beach—no sand, and no puddles, for your sea bear hates both, the one getting into his eyes, the other spoiling his coat and health. And the whole of that beach along the shore to the right, along the shore to the left, inland far into the shifting fog for miles, was one heaving, rolling, squirming, rearing, struggling, battling, fanning—it was already humid, I said—lolling, quivering, roaring, gurgling, growling, hissing, clucking, piping, whistling multitude of sea bears.

Never did you see so many sea bears. Never did you guess, perhaps, that there were so many sea bears. Certainly never did you think there would be so many sea bears crowded into one place. To be exact, there were upon the beaches or "hauling grounds," as the natives are pleased to call them, along those Arctic island shores, no fewer than two hundred

and ninety-four thousand sea bears, of which no fewer than ninety-three thousand, two hundred and fifty were adult breeding females, the rest non-adult females and males, with only a comparatively small proportion—a too small proportion for the safety of the species almost—of adult and old males, or bulls as they are termed, all either upon the shore, crowded out of the shore inland, or swimming about among the breakers in the offing, trying to land upon the shore.

Nevertheless, in spite of the chaos, there was, Ursina saw at second glance, a rough sense of order in the confusion. The adult and old males, having nearly all, except Ursina and a few more, arrived quite a month before the females, had each taken up a station unto himself, which he was now at once trying to fill with every female sea bear he could coax, grab, or round up, within his jurisdiction, and to fight off all rivals who would encroach upon, or oust him from, his claim. The result was half hell let loose in the wild, and deafening beyond words.

To describe the whole riot were a hundred times more impossible than to watch all Barnum and Bailey's circus performing at once, and our business is, after all, with friend Ursina himself.

Ursina came up "like a god from the sea," all wet, glistening, and dark gray in streaks and patches, shaking the drops from his long bristling whiskers as he rolled up beyond the waves, weaving his massive head so that the great neck muscles gathered and ran under his incomparable coat all up and down his heavy neck and great shoulders.



THINGS being as they were, he could not take ten wriggles—'twere gross flattery to call his progress a walk—before he trespassed upon some other bull's claim, or pitch, or station—call it what you will.

The little females, dainty, soft eyed, gentle ladies no more than four feet long, two and a half in girth and weighing seventy to a hundred pounds, were landing all around him. One was half a yard

ahead of him. A big bull bang ahead shoved his great cranium round, grabbed her by the scruff of her neck with disgusting roughness, and hauled her bodily up to his pitch. Another bull behind hurled forward, seized the hapless female, wrenched her horridly and brutally from the first bull, whose teeth left a red scar four inches long—though she never said anything, never complained, never retaliated—and lumbered aside with her.

Then Ursina arrived—and it was some arrival, too.

Things quite began to happen. Roaring furiously, and in a scattering, scuttering shower of spray and pebbles, Ursina came, flung along literally, just for all the world like a great mass of rock shot by the force of some big explosion. It was an impressive introduction, and though other bulls had charged, would charge, and were charging, in many, and every ferocious manner, all around, there was none who delivered his ultimatum of war quite after this crashing fashion.

The first bull was knocked clean over, out of the way. The second bull, a grizzled beast scarred and old in war, met the force of the impact with something between a growl and a whistle of knocked out wind. In a flash, before he could let go the unfortunate lady sea bear, Ursina, with jaws agape, had seized him by the throat, and once there, there Ursina stayed—worse than any bulldog.

It was not a gentle picture, that fight which followed, I can assure you, because the combatants were about eight feet long—the one rather over, the other rather under—and in the highest of high condition of fat, blubber, muscle, and sinew that months of good feeding and the prime fish of many seas could make them.

It was, in fact, not a fight at all in the true sense, for Ursina had got his patent strangle hold, and the other might buck it if he could. For a long time he could not.

He writhed, he reared, he plunged, he cannoned into rivals, he barged into parties, he bit, he snapped, he wrenched, he tore, and all the time he roared a hoarse and grating roar of indescribable ferocity,

never for one second did he unhitch Ursina—whose dead weight, by the way, alone took some shifting. Indeed nothing but sheer colossal brute strength could break him away, and in the end, after one of the most devilish protracted struggles ever, sheer brute strength did. But the result was horrible, for—well, something had to give way and it was not Ursina's jaws.

Ursina's foe staggered, blundering drunkenly sidewise, wrenching maddened chopping slashes at Ursina, and lay for a moment still, a red ghastliness about the throat, and spouting blood in crimson streams.

Ursina, however, had been brought up in a world, the great, cold cruel world of the sea, wherein there is no excuse, and pity does not exist. He was upon his foe instantly with a lumbering charge, whistling rage as he came, and that foe rose up to meet him roaring still but shocking to behold.

The gentle little female sea bears who were landing, and those the old bull had gathered into a harem round him, stumbled and rolled every way to get out of reach of the warring giants, who were as likely to scrunch hold of them in their blind maddened fury as they were of each other.

Some were grabbed by other bulls on adjoining pitches. In consequence some fled, but it made no odds to the battling bulls. Nothing could make any difference to either of them now except—ah! The old bull with one last rending roar flung himself rolling—his flippers were torn shreds—a red and sickening blot in the eye of day, down the beach, and the trail behind him was as red as a red stair carpet. The waves took him in a spout of spray and he vanished from sight. It was as well. There was scarce room for living on that beach, *let alone the dead.*

After that Ursina formally and by right of conquest annexed the station hitherto owned by the old bull sea bear, and held it valiantly against all comers through many bloody battles, through stress of storm, starvation, and thirst, without food and

without drink for *three solid months*, during which time he had accumulated and had to guard a harem of no less than fifteen dainty wives.

And when at last he finally took to the sea again late in August, he was weak, emaciated, torn, and scarred almost beyond recognition but—he had made good, and in so doing had done his duty, as a man is bound to do.

But before he went, before indeed they all, grizzled warriors, fathers,

mothers, flappers and “mits,” went back to the sea again from whence they came, they might have requested me to rise right here and present their unanimous vote of thanks to the honored and honorable Government of the United States of America for its strong, firm and far sighted legislation, which has preserved them all from certain and speedy extinction, and incidentally made the priceless luxury of the sealskin coat, and also this humble story, possible.

A Wet Day in Aden

By WM. ASHLEY ANDERSON

MANY speak of Aden as resembling a pile of cinders and ashes in a hot grate. And it *is* hot and dry. Although I can find vegetation in hidden nooks on the far slopes of the volcanic mass that forms the peninsula, most observers will tell you with sufficient accuracy that no trees or foliage grow on parched Aden.

But in Crater, which is the old part of Aden, there are the famous Tanks, great empty reservoirs, built in ancient times by unknown engineers. Tourists occasionally visit the Tanks, and look down from the brims wondering where water ever came from to fill them. I can explain.

While at breakfast on a morning at the end of August, we were suddenly startled by the sound of thunder. It began to rain heavily. In a few seconds rain was roaring down into the streets.

Randall and I put on waterproofs and rope shoes and made our way through the flooded streets where Banians and Khojas, Somalis and Jews were paddling about like children, until we came to the bridge below the camel yard.

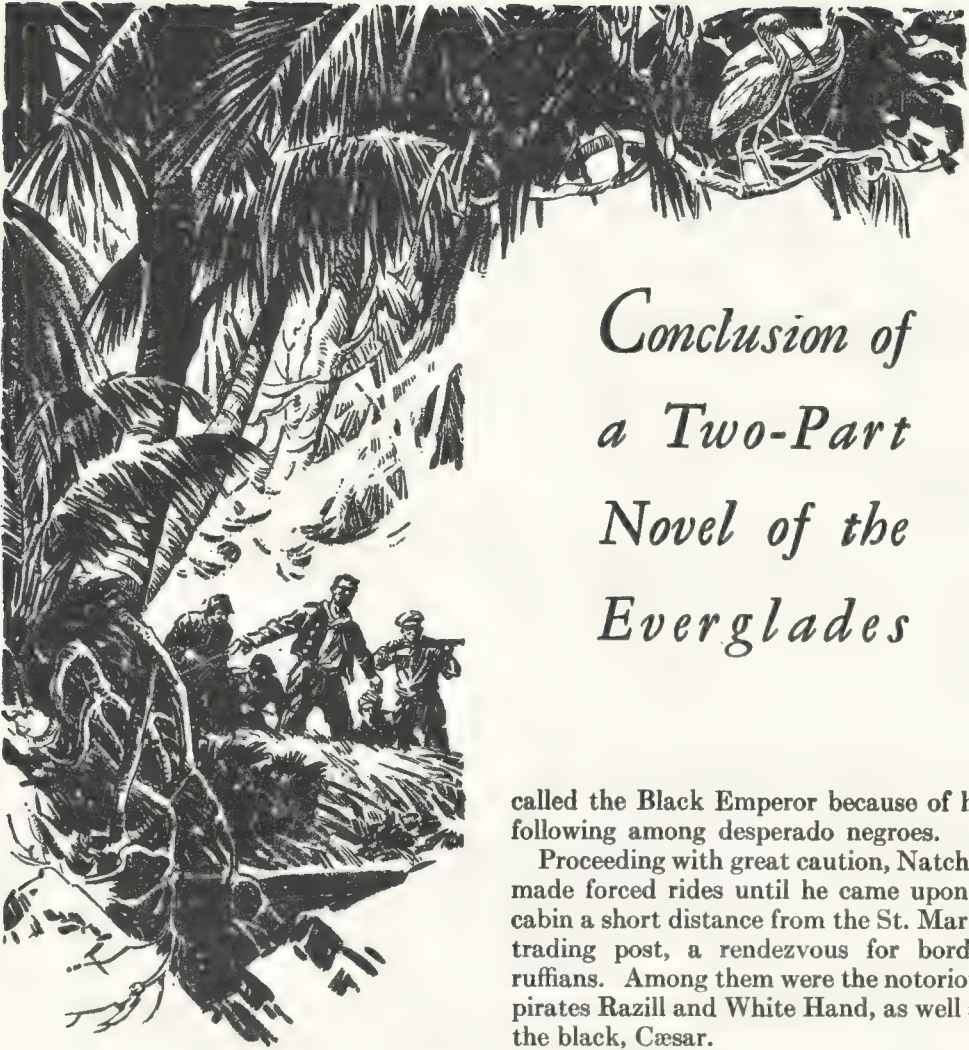
A small torrent was already sweeping down the *nullah* through the very heart

of the city. The water was so high by this time that it was impossible for wagons to cross the stream.

From here we went up in the rain to the Tanks where a crowd of natives was rapidly assembling. With the background of drab rocks and the gray skies above, the vivid and riotous colors of their garments seemed like a mass of flowers flung upon the waters of a muddy stream. From the crests of the encircling mountains water was leaping down in brown and silver cataracts, falling hundreds of feet before being caught by the conduits and diverted into the Tanks.

We watched the first tank fill up. The water rose in the huge basin as rapidly as water in a bath tub with both faucets turned on. We climbed the steep sides of the cañon, and from there we could see the first Tank overflow and the waters rush through the connecting channel and plunge into the second Tank, while the joyous shouting crowd surged along beside the stream trying to keep pace with it, cheering and laughing.

The rain fell for not much longer than half an hour. Over seven million gallons poured into the Tanks in an hour!



Conclusion of a Two-Part Novel of the Everglades

NATCHEZ RODNEY, General Andrew Jackson's trusted courier, left Nashville, Tennessee, for Florida with specific instructions to accomplish two tasks: to warn the Irishman, Captain Ned McCarty, late of Lafitte's pirate settlement at Barataria, that he would be hanged unless he stopped fomenting trouble against the United States among the Seminoles; and secondly, to account for—dead or alive—the giant black, Cæsar, a murderous runaway slave sometimes

called the Black Emperor because of his following among desperado negroes.

Proceeding with great caution, Natchez made forced rides until he came upon a cabin a short distance from the St. Marks trading post, a rendezvous for border ruffians. Among them were the notorious pirates Razill and White Hand, as well as the black, Cæsar.

Natchez found the cabin—which offered sanctuary to any wayfarer because it was a Seminole "white stick" or "peace" village—to be tenanted by a lone girl, who amazed him by telling him that she was Isobella McCarty, daughter of the Captain McCarty he sought. And the scout's problem was further complicated by the girl's avowed intention of accompanying him into St. Marks.

The American found a full roster of cutthroats assembled at the post. The Black Emperor was quick to suspect him, and at his first hostile move Natchez struck him down. And immediately a ruffian called Captain Fan was upon him

DEVIL'S BREW

By

HUGH PENDEXTER

with a knife. In the fierce fight that took place Natchez managed to kill his assailant. Then he and the girl fled for the trading post of Israel Blate, a man friendly to Old Hickory.

Blate received the refugees kindly, and told them that McCarty was thought to be on a pirate schooner, anchored to the south at the mouth of the Calusahatchee River. He also informed them that Razill, White Hand and Cæsar were friends of the pirate leaders, Old Jack and Wolf-face.

Shortly after leaving the trading post Natchez fell in with a band of friendly Seminoles. Their chief, Tall Tiger, agreed to look out for Isobella McCarty while the American went on alone to the anchorage of the schooner.

Natchez was gratified to find the Black Emperor on hand when he arrived at the ship and, determined upon a showdown, he welcomed the attack of the black, whom he despatched after a terrific hand-to-hand encounter. Then, seeking



out McCarty, he told the Irishman of Jackson's message and of his daughter's whereabouts.

McCarty laughed at the proposed hanging, and persuaded Natchez to accompany him to a sacred lake of the Seminoles, nearby, before returning to Tall Tiger's camp for Isobella.

"There's gold to be had, lad—we'll be rich!"

Against his better judgment Natchez agreed and, arriving at the lake, he was

amazed to see the Irishman strip and dive from the boat into the water. Looking overside Natchez saw McCarty disappear into the window of what looked to be an ancient submerged dwelling. A moment later, the agonized face of the Irishman appeared in the opening, his hands supplicating—then he vanished.

WITHOUT an instant of hesitation the Kentuckian was streaking down to the window. The Irishman's left hand and arm were suddenly thrust over the ledge. Natchez seized the hand, braced his feet against the ancient masonry and pulled with all his might. McCarty's head and shoulders shot into view. Natchez knew his friend was in some sort of trap and must drown within very few seconds unless he were got to the surface.

With another powerful heave he had McCarty half through the window, and this effort also brought into view a head so evil as to be obscene—the head of a huge water snake. The mouth gaped wide, and Natchez thrust his long knife at it and spoiled one baleful eye. The coils loosened instantly, and the Kentuckian had his companion free and was taking him to the surface. He hooked an arm over the side of the boat and got the Irishman's head out of water. He glanced down. There was something moving swiftly across the white area and streaking to the east, something long and dark, which swam by writhing. It was quickly swallowed up by the murky waters.

Holding McCarty by the hair of his head Natchez managed to get into the boat. The Irishman was alive, but had swallowed some water and was half strangled. Groaning with pain and fighting for the breath of life, it was minutes before he could aid himself. Natchez hurried ashore and dragged the inert form up the bank and began the work of resuscitation. McCarty continued his gasping cries. After some ten minutes of choking and groaning he managed to say:

"Yez saw it an' yet yez came down! I felt yez pullin' my arm from the socket."

"I knifed it through the eye. A huge snake, the like of which I never dreamed to see. God grant I'll never see its like again."

Still groaning and coughing, McCarty lifted himself to a sitting posture and moaned:

"No snake can scare the McCarty! I'll be goin' back when I git my wind, an' have it out with the bloody devil."

"It was making for the east end of the lake when I last saw it," said Natchez. "You will not go down again. Its mate may be in there."

Natchez picked up his rifle and warned—"Don't jump if you hear me shoot."

He walked a few rods from the camp and shot a pigeon. With skewers fashioned from a limb, whittled sharp at each end, he made bait of the bird with the sticks thrust through the body at different angles. McCarty followed him to the boat but asked no questions. Natchez worked the boat back to the old position and fastened an end of the rope to the pigeon and commenced strange angling. With a fragment of conglomerate, brought up in the bag along with the gold, he weighted the line and lowered it close to the window, bobbing it gently up and down. After half a minute something darted forth, quicker than the flash of a rapier, and engulfed the feathery bait.

"Pull for the shore!" yelled Natchez. "We've caught the devil!"

He referred to the violent convulsions of something just outside the dark window. McCarty remained frozen, his eyes glaring. For an instant the two men glimpsed it as it tore through the lighted path. They got a suggestion of widely distended jaws, held apart by the skewers. It streaked into the murky obscurity to the east; and neither man could say whether it was the monster Natchez had knifed or another.

Natchez rapidly hauled in the rope and exhibited the end.

"Bit it clean in two when it hogged the

bird. We'll get more bait and see if another is in that dark hole." But although they fished for an hour no tenant appeared. Work was suspended until the next morning, as the Irishman was in no condition to labor.

With the new sun Natchez insisted on making the first trip. McCarty never knew how his friend dreaded the venture. He urged him to wait and experiment with a long sweep. But the Kentuckian was forced to confess his inability to devise a way of getting the gold up to the boat without losing the greater part of it. So he stripped and dived, and his quick trip resulted in a bag of the doll-like objects. He told McCarty:

"Nothing evil inside there now. I could sense it if there was. But neither of us will go in there again."

McCarty still was badly shaken. He readily agreed:

"It's a bargain. Besides, it's rich picking there in the light of the blessed sun."

When they had finished the day's work they estimated the gold to be worth some twenty-five thousand dollars. McCarty insisted his friend take half, but Natchez refused to accept any. Both vowed they were through with the place. Securing their horses, and improvising saddle bags of braided vines, around which they wrapped their blankets, they rode north for three miles and turned to the southwest. They were retracing the route they had taken in gaining the lake.

They were pushing along a dim trail when Natchez suddenly pointed and cried:

"Look—buzzards! They've found something!"

"They be always findin' somethin'—a necessary evil," said McCarty.

They struck into a trade trail which permitted faster traveling, and by sundown had arrived at the scene of a terrible butchery. The fell scavengers heavily left the ground and flapped to the nearest trees. On the ground were stretched the remains of six Seminole warriors.

Natchez pointed to one dead man and whispered:

"He was called the Otter. He took me down the river when I went to find the schooner."

McCarty swung to earth, and after reading the signs he reported:

"Five white men did this. All booted. They made south after the killing."

A mile from the spot they concealed the gold and were free to ride posthaste for the village of Tall Tiger.

CHAPTER IX

BLACK AND WHITE MEDICINE

THE river camp of the Tiger was deserted. McCarty deduced that the band was running from the men who massacred the six Indians in the north. Natchez believed Tall Tiger never would retreat without making a fight.

The trail extended to the southwest and was followed at a gallop. After three miles of travel the journey ended on a small tributary of the stream the band had forsaken. Natchez told his companion—

"I smell trouble, Señor McCarty."

"I be thinkin' only of my daughter, Señor Natchez. A devil brat has spied us. Forward!"

He referred to the chief's son who darted from behind some bush growth and among the cabins, shouting his discovery cry. Warriors at once emerged, armed with spears, bows and arrows, and a few trade muskets. These hostile demonstrations ceased once the newcomers were recognized.

Tall Tiger, gloomy of visage, awaited them in front of his new house. Partially concealed in the bush were a considerable number of blacks, a new addition since Natchez fared to Okeechabee. Señorita McCarty, aroused from her siesta, raced forward to greet the newcomers. Natchez was in the lead and the girl greeted him with shrill enthusiasm, crying:

"Señor Natchez, my friend! You do come back. They said you were dead!"

He was out of the saddle, his hand extended to clasp hers, but now she was beholding her father. It was their first meeting since he had left her under Tattooed Serpent's protection. With a little squeal of delight she flung herself into his arms. He lifted her from the ground, kissed her fondly and grinned. Pride in her, and a certain awe of her, were reflected in his welcoming grimace. She embraced him frantically, while scolding:

"Again the bad child! Again the runaway! What do you mean? What bad company have you been keeping? You shall answer me!"

"Little sweetheart, I have been in the company of our friend, Natchez. But I see Tall Tiger is scowling at this show of affection. We must hurry to greet him."

"He has lost his medicine. He is very much afraid of something. There is a new medicine man in the village. Spawn of the Evil One! He scares the Tiger."

He patted her head and placed fingers across her lips to still her babble, and swung forward to meet the chief. The Tiger was restrained in his bearing. His glance was cold as he shook hands with the Irishman. His gaze warmed a bit as it rested on the Kentuckian. To McCarty he said—

"The birds say you have been at bad work."

"The birds are evil witches, my friend," gravely assured McCarty, speaking the Creek patois of the Seminoles faultlessly. "What do they tell you?"

"That you make friends with us, but that you love only the men from the cold North."

"They lie. Would I leave my daughter with people whom I did not love and trust?"

Somewhat mollified, but not yet ready to unbend, the chief turned to Natchez, took him by the hand, and said—

"It is good to meet a white man who does not come to steal from our people."

"Your friend has bad news to tell," said Natchez.

McCarty told of the massacre to make sure the chief understood.

Tall Tiger's expression changed none, but new fires instantly blazed in his black eyes. "That is a bad trail to follow, but it must be traveled," he calmly said. "Who killed them?"

"White men," promptly said McCarty.

"How came my brothers there?" His voice was ominous.

McCarty described their flight from the schooner at the mouth of the river and explained how they had swung north so as not to lead any pursuers to the Tiger's town.

"The Long Knives from the Tennessee Fire killed them," said the chief.

McCarty shook his head and insisted:

"No men from the Tennessee Fire have reached even the towns in the north yet. Bad white men did it. Jackson, the big chief from the Tennessee Fire, will hang them to trees if he catches them."

The Otter's woman, apprised of her husband's death, shook her hair over her face and ran, howling dismally, back among the huts. Tall Tiger gave sharp orders, and ten runners were sent to the scene of the fight, or massacre, with instructions to erect a *to-hop-ki* for each slain warrior. Lowering glances were directed at the newcomers. Much more than four days must have elapsed since the violent demise of the Seminoles. During that crucial period no charred wood had rested at head and feet, and in their hands. They had been at the evil mercy of the supernatural witch birds for all that time, and might suffer similar tortures for time without end.

Tall Tiger stalked moodily back to his cabin. None of his people crowded around these bringers of evil news.

Isobella took advantage of this aloofness to say:

"This is very terrible. General Jackson's agent is here with terms of peace. Now these poor people and our people will surely fight it out."

"Jackson's agent?" exclaimed Natchez. "Where is he? Who is he?"

"Señor Blate. He is in the woods,

hunting. The pirates have spoiled his errand."

"The pirates are far south, in Arbuthnot's schooner," corrected McCarty.

"Two of them were here three days ago," said the girl. "I stayed indoors all the time. The man with the white hand and arm. The one, also, they call Razill. They promised the Tiger they would help in his fight with Señor Jackson. They went away the day before Señor Blate came."

The chief entered his thatched house and summoned the older men to join him in council. The white men took possession of an empty shelter next to the one occupied by the girl and held a council of their own, with Señorita McCarty sitting between them.

"We must leave an' get across the Alabama line," began McCarty. "It's them red seamen divils who butchered the Seminole men. A big band must have come up the river. Two came to see the chief. T'others moved north. We must leave tonight."

"But they are angry with all whites," said the girl. "I do not think they will let us go. They have treated me well, but they remember I am white."

"Why did they change their camping place?" asked Natchez. "Trail looked as if they were scared of something."

"Oh, Señor Natchez! You are very wise. A medicine man, a black, came to the other camp. He did many mysterious things. He frightened Señor Tiger. We came here."



NATCHEZ worried his brows and tugged at his red hair.

"I believe we're in a bad fix. I noticed several negroes in the camp. If a black witch doctor had enough influence to get the chief to make a new camp, he will make much trouble for us."

"From a woman who speaks some Spanish, I learned about the witch man. Oh, a horrible monkey-like creature! Said a great evil was coming to some of Tall Tiger's people," said the girl.

"There's the poor divils murderers north by the bloody pirates to make tim monkey man's talk ring true," groaned McCarty. "It's the ignorance of them that we have to face and fear."

Natchez firmly insisted—

"You two people must start north at once."

"Sayin' they'll let my daughter an' me do that, what about you, my friend?" asked McCarty.

"I'll skip out. It will be easy. I can throw in with Blate. He must have lots of influence."

"Then he'll have enough to arrange for the three of us to go," Isabella countered.

"Whether he does, or doesn't, I tell you I can sneak away any time."

The girl knit her brows for a moment, then said:

"Try it. I left my scarf at the edge of the woods where I went this morning to be alone, and in the shade. Bring it to me, please."

Natchez immediately started on the errand. Immediately two warriors, one on each side of him, strolled in the same direction. Two others hurried ahead of him, while one man loitered behind him. On finding the scarf he glanced carelessly about, and beheld an Indian ahead staring at the top of a tree. The others were close by, all interested in observing nature and seemingly oblivious of his presence. He was hemmed in. He rejoined his friends and handed over the scarf.

"Easiest thing in the world. I could go and drive a cow ahead of me."

"Amiable and loyal liar," said the girl. "We watched you. You were helplessly bottled up. But your lie will not be held against you, my friend."

"It was noble of yez," agreed McCarty. "But it's facts we must face."

"There's one way," Natchez said thoughtfully. "Only one I can think of. You two can pull out with Blate. He has influence with the tribes. If Tall Tiger won't let him take the three of us away he can take you two. The Tiger likes me. I'd be in no peril. I'll stay and pick up

more news for Jackson. I'll send Blate's message to Jackson by you. You can explain why I'm down here so long."

"You forget that Señor Monkey-man does Señor Tiger's thinking for him," reminded the girl. "Or enough of it to keep a white man here."

The men exchanged glances, wondering what avenue of escape to seek next. McCarty's brows drew down in a frown. He sternly told the young man:

"I'll sacrifice almost anything to get my girl back to the States. Yez mean well by me an' mine, my son, but don't try to fool us. Remember the scarf. You'd be overhauled before you could reach the Georgia or Alabama line. There's one thing we can do. Wait till Blate comes in. He's the lad to pull our chestnuts out of the fire."

He scarcely had finished speaking when a hearty voice was calling;

"Ahoy, you good folks in there! Come out. The natives are suspicious that you're cooking a dish that won't be to their liking."

"Blate!" cried McCarty.

The trader greeted him genially, but despite the heartiness of his voice he was disturbed. After shaking hands with Natchez and bowing low to the girl, he talked rapidly, saying:

"I am told you have informed the chief that some of his Seminoles have been killed up north of this camp. It was a crazy thing for you to do. You've made this a very bad place for a white man to be in. I believe I might make Tall Tiger realize that you two men haven't been slaughtering his people. Your coming here, and giving him the news, would tend to show that much. Yet regardless of your innocence the red code is a life for a life. If Seminoles have been killed, then some whites must follow them. But that isn't all."

"May the saints help us!" McCarty piously crossed himself.

"There is the devil worker, Enko," rapidly continued Blate. "His influence with the chief is great. He has promised to remove the penalty of a premature death

that hovers over the Tiger because of the song he sang while drunk."

"A nigger witch doctor!" growled McCarty.

"Aye. But down here, ignorance may walk ahead of knowledge," Blate reminded. "Enko's black back is criss-crossed by scars from an overseer's whip. He claims to be a brother of black Cæsar. I do not believe it. But he hates white folks. I'm honest enough to say I'd be afraid of him if not for his belief that I represent Spain. I allow him to think that. But when he knows you men are here—" He halted abruptly, as if remembering the girl's presence for the first time:

"What then?" demanded Natchez impatiently.

"It will largely concern you, my friend. He's been told you killed his brother with a powerful medicine. There's a large number of blacks down here who believe all he says, as do some of the Indians, including Tall Tiger. Naturally he claims he has a *juju* medicine that can kill you and will kill you."

"Superstition and ignorance—" began McCarty.

"Sit on the throne where all are ignorant and superstitious," completed the trader. "My friends, don't for a moment think the man isn't deadly. He's as venomous as a swamp spider, or rattler. I think he's sincere in his belief in his medicine. I verily believe he has a pact with the devil. He is one colored man the Indians are very much afraid of. Strange voices are heard in his hut when he is alone in there. Several ghosts talking."

"Lots of our northern red medicine men are ventriloquists," said Natchez.

"I've heard many, but none like him," said Blate. "I advise you, my young friend, to use your head. He'll be after you. I can get the girl away, probably her father; but I can't pull you out. If you can get the start of him, and jump him, the nigger in him will be scared of the very kind of deception that he knowingly practises."

"For example, Señor Blate?" urged the girl.

Blate pursed his lips thoughtfully and mused:

"Natchez has red hair. That will help. It's supposed to be medicine. Now for a trick. If he could claim he was bullet proof—if he could improvise a bullet proof waistcoat to wear under his shirt—and let Enko fire at his heart, say—"

"The nigger would aim at the heart an' hit him in the eye," broke in McCarty.

"Maybe you're right," gloomily admitted Blate. "Enko is the first peril to be removed. If he was dead . . ."

"If we had wings," sighed McCarty. "Yez mean to say, Señor Blate, that the nigger's running this red camp?"

The trader bowed his head. He explained:

"He has Tall Tiger under his influence. The chief has no more desire to die than we have. But he believes he must because of his drunken singing. If black magic can protect him, what won't he give? Certainly the life of a white man. What if the lives of two white men is the price? I can do this, however. I can take the señorita under my protection and guarantee her safe arrival at my post near the Hatcha Hallowaggi. The task of getting her into the States from there will be easy. Probably, unhindered by the young lady, you two might make your escape."

"I will not go away and leave the grand *caballero* McCarty behind," fiercely announced the girl.

Natchez raised his hand for silence.

"I'm trying to think of a coup. I'll stroll about and speak to the warriors I know."



WITHOUT more ado he left the three and walked among the Seminole cabins. The men eyed him suspiciously, yet returned his salutations with grave courtesy. He felt as if they were greeting something which was almost finished. Before one shelter he paused and picked

up a little boy and tossed him in his arms. The mother was pleased and offered him food. He took a piece of bear meat, hot from the kettle, and a piece of *koonti* bread. He was still eating when he returned to the shelter where he and McCarty had left their belongings. Once beyond the espionage, even of his friends, he quickly drew the bullet from his rifle. The woman's gift of food had determined him to gamble his life on a simple trick; and with his greasy fingers he deftly rolled a good sized pellet from the *koonti* bread.

Before he could join his friends a terrible hullabaloo resounded outside. He peered through the wall of thatched leaves, and beheld a strange and repellent throng emerging from the woods and approaching the camp. Ahead pranced a grotesque shape, which resembled nothing human; the figure of a black man, hideously marked with red and white paint, with wide circles of white around the goggling eyes. The creature held some sort of contrivance, made of roots, in his mouth, which distorted features already repulsive, and gave him the appearance of having tusks instead of teeth. The black was as short of stature as his brother, the black Emperor, had been tall. He advanced with dragging steps, and he continually swung his head from side to side. Seminole women ducked into their cabins so as to escape his medicine gaze. Occasionally he faced the weird company following him, and revealed a hideous face carved from wood, and colored with soot and trade paint, which he wore on the back of his head. At a short distance there was the illusion that he had two faces.

His followers, runaway slaves, were tricked out after the monstrous buffoonry of ancient Africa. None of these approached the degree of hideousness that was presented by the leader. When near the white men the noise suddenly ceased. Squatting low and walking in a ridiculous manner, suggesting the hopping strides of a gigantic frog, the medicine man drew closer. He was silent now, but in pantomime portrayed a devil's exultation.

Measured on his own plane he was a great actor.

The effect on the Seminoles was strong. The dancing monstrosity was viewed with awe and fear. Natchez knew he must offset it to some degree before it reached a climax. He suddenly burst from shelter and briskly walked to meet the medicine man. The latter ceased his advance and contented himself with dancing, stiff legged, from side to side, and all the time rolling his head and waving his hands and arms in undulating movements ahead of him. The latter was to remind the on-lookers that he was working with the medicine of the Serpent People.

Natchez advanced with moderate steps until almost up to him and then took a swift stride forward which would have resulted in a collision, had not the magic worker leaped backward.

"You runaway dog, you shall be whipped!" cried Natchez.

For a bit the medicine man was out of his rôle. Then he remembered that slavery was behind him; and he began moving his hands sinuously, and presented something of an anti-climax by crying—

"Black snake medicine for massa white man."

Natchez held up his rifle and asked—

"Can you shoot a gun?"

"Shoot like de debbil. No dog, no whip down here," sullenly replied the black.

"You have no medicine," loudly proclaimed the Kentuckian. "Dogs chased you and you were afraid." He spoke slowly so Blate could fully interpret his words for the benefit of Tall Tiger. "You are a cheat. You say you can shoot a gun. Can you shoot like this?"

He looked up to the sky where the air was alive with feathered folk, and waited for a moment. Then the bird life scattered before a hawk.

"Can you shoot like this?" he repeated.

He threw up the rifle quickly and fired without seeming to take aim. The hawk slipped from the aerial trail and fluttered to the ground. Turning back to the painted creature Natchez poured a charge of powder from his horn into the rifle and

held a black bullet, made of *koonti* flour and grease, before the medicine man, and carefully dropped it in the barrel. Then he sent it home and rammed down a bit of wadding.

Turning to the gaping assemblage he slowly and loudly announced:

"This man has no medicine. Is there a Seminole here who can not take this loaded gun and shoot me through the heart?"

Tall Tiger, his eyes glistening, shook his head. Natchez continued—

"Is there a boy here, strong enough to pull the trigger, who can not shoot this gun and kill me if I stand still?" Heads were generally shaken.

"Then what do you think of this man, who puts on paint and says he is a medicine man, if he aims the gun and can not hit me? If he can not shoot a bullet straight, will his medicine work straight?"

The head gesture of denial this time was even more emphatic. Natchez capped the rifle, gave the barrel a sharp tap to shake powder into the pan; then cocked the weapon and handed it to the black. Stepping back twenty feet and opening his hunting shirt, he cried—

"Let all my Seminole friends watch this man shoot."

He nodded for the black to fire and stood motionless. The medicine man bent far over and walked with his prancing step around in a small circle. He gave an excellent pantomime of a hunter trailing big game. The theater of all this mummery appealed to the red men. They built themselves in the drama being enacted. They breathed deep as the hunter paused, as if about to discover the game. One warrior muttered—

"He hunts a big bear."

Suddenly the medicine man dropped on one knee and shaded his eyes with one hand as if seeking a better view of the game. Then he was aiming the rifle, his hands made steady with confidence. Without a tremor he brought the black muzzle to bear on the white man's fifth rib.

McCarty scowled savagely as he

viewed the scene, although he knew some trick was being played on the black. But it was too real. He had seen the bullet drop into the rifle barrel. The girl clung to his arm and buried her face against his shoulder. Blate's eyes dilated, a half smile twisting his lips.



THE black indulged in more mummery, yelled loudly three times, and pulled the trigger. The explosion of the rifle caused even the Seminoles to jump nervously. There was a general patting of fingers against the lips, to express astonishment, when Natchez was beheld, still standing erect, only now his lips were drawn back so that all might see the bullet caught and held between his teeth.

The black doctor glared in mingled terror and amazement, then turned and scuttled into the growth as if pursued by demons. Tall Tiger appeared to be incapable of physical action for a fraction of a minute. He stared wildly at the Kentuckian, then at the rifle on the ground and, lastly, after the vanishing medicine man. He realized that the medicine, which he had depended upon to remove the curse of a premature death, had collapsed. With head sagging, his limbs moving slowly like those of an old man, he walked away, speaking to no one.

McCarty by a terrific effort smothered a wild laugh and gasped:

"It's so auld it's new! Glory be!"

"Of course you never really loaded the gun," Blate said.

"It's plain I never caught a bullet in my teeth as it came out of a rifle," replied Natchez. "Well, let's hope that spoils the tricks of the black for a time. Suppose we do some planning."

"Come to my lodge. It's bigger and cooler," urged Blate. "And I can give you a drink of some excellent rum. Surely there must be some way for you three people out of this trap."

"That's fine of you, Blate. We know the road is open to you any time you want to go."

"I never leave my friends in the lurch,"

said the trader. "I can take the señorita along without any hindrance. I still think that is the wisest move, as it would leave you two men in a better position for a quick flight."

"All must be saved, or none," said the girl.

"Don't be a little fool, darlin'," coaxed her father. "Natchez an' yer honorable father can get clear of any red band on the continent, if we don't have any female baggage to look after."

The girl was obdurate. The conversation was interrupted by the return of Enko. His egotism was rebounding, and his coming was punctuated by grotesque prancing. He halted before the group and shouted some gibberish and pretended to listen to a sea shell he had appropriated in some cabin. He carried a trade musket and he harangued it in an unknown tongue. Then he proceeded to load it. Natchez's brows drew down, and with a hand on his long pistol he stepped apart from his friends so they might not participate in his danger did the black try another shot at him. He closely watched the half crazed charlatan brandishing the loaded gun while he addressed the camp in the Creek trade jargon.

"I fear he is going to try his own weapon on you," Blate warned.

McCarty advanced to the black and addressed him in no measured terms. The man cringed from habit, yet held his ground and sullenly attempted to explain. McCartney was quick to understand. Using the trade jargon, the vehicle of commercial intercourse among all the southern tribes, the witch doctor announced he was about to do the white man's "medicine." He had loaded the gun, but his black medicine would kill the bullet so it would do no harm. As Natchez caught this much he palmed a bullet and joined the two and took the gun and shook it as if skeptical.

Enko did not object. He turned about and proclaimed to the whole village that he was about to make a loaded gun harmless as "massa white man" had done. He announced he would shoot point-blank at

one of Tall Tiger's fierce hunting dogs and do it no harm. Natchez handed back the gun and winked at McCarty. Then the latter understood that there was a bullet in the barrel, even though the black had loaded only with powder and wadding.

Tall Tiger reappeared, a woman having carried word to him of the black's recapture of his lost medicine. The medicine man, supremely pleased to have won an attentive audience, danced furiously and shouted commands at the gun. Then he advanced on the dog pack and halted before the first animal he came to. The fierce beast snarled and edged toward him. The black, disliking closer proximity, thrust forward the gun and fired. To his amazement the brute dropped dead.

Tall Tiger's eyes blazed with anger at the loss of his dog, while his heart turned white as he realized the man's magic never could remove the curse of the Green Corn Dance song. Blate hastened to explain to the chief that the black's medicine had left him. Tall Tiger's son proceeded to examine the dead brute. He yelped a discovery cry, and called out to his father that the dog not only was dead from a bullet, but that he had been hit with *two* bullets.

The African was confounded by this intelligence. Then he was claiming he had used the wrong medicine, and had employed the one which doubled things. He actually believed he had accomplished this miracle, and he quickly recovered much of his former aplomb.

"The idiot believed in his medicine so strongly that he actually loaded the gun. But if they examine the brute they'll notice the difference in size of the two bullets," Natchez whispered to McCarty.

"It's a sorry business," mumbled McCarty. "The black devil will twist it about to favor himself."

He spoke with much wisdom. The chief's anger at the loss of the dog, and at the apparent failure of the witch doctor's medicine, soon lost its edge. The black obviously had a powerful medicine even though it at times got out of control.

Did Tall Tiger abandon belief, then he must submit to the fate of one who sings a sacred song out of time and place.

Blate renewed his invitation and the whites joined him in his large cabin. McCarty took to the rum with avidity. It seemed to have no effect, except to make him talkative. Blate repeated his urging that the girl travel north under his escort. Natchez, depressed in spirits, joined with him. The girl persisted in her stubbornness. McCarty was loud of voice.

"These Siminoles be runaways from the Lower Creeks, that's all," he announced. "I know their folk lore, their tribal customs. I can join in their Green Corn Dance an' not make a false step. An' niver be I so drunk I'd ever think of singin' their Green Corn medicine song except durin' the busk, as they call their celebration. I know their notions of religion. God forgive me for callin' their heathen customs by that name!"

"We know you're very wise in all that has to do with the Southern tribes," blandly agreed Blate. "But don't go too deep into their superstitions, or you'll get tangled up. These runaways have responded to a new influence they've found down here. They have developed a cult that their Alabama relatives know very little about. They have developed myths about an Old People, and they worship them as gods. Woe to the man who meddles with that branch of their religion. They have come to believe gold caused the death of the Old People. So they are keen to trade it for silver, which is harmless."

"What else about the Auld People?" demanded McCarty, now feeling the independence of thought which copious draughts of raw rum can give.

Blate glanced outside to make sure there were no eavesdroppers, even though he was talking low and in English.

"I had in mind their myth about the two-head people who, they believe, built the ancient roads and forts down here."

"With wings," McCarty promptly added.

Blate's eyes flew widely open. Natchez

drove an elbow into the Irishman's back.

"Be careful, McCarty," murmured Blate, his expression still worried. "I'm afraid you know too much. What put wings into your head?"

The Irishman now was on the defensive.

"I was just picturin' the devils they must believe in. Devils have wings. Maybe their fear of the raven-mocker goes back to that."

"That's more a Cherokee superstition. It was old before the discontented Creeks separated from the tribes and came down here to live," said Blate. "Never repeat what you've said to me while you are in the Floridas."

A fearful clamor brought them to their feet and crowding to the entrance of the cabin. Blate huskily asked—

"What new trouble can this be?"

"A bold face will soon help us to find out," said Natchez.

He set the example by swaggering toward the excited mob of red and black men. These were milling around Tall Tiger's house. Enko had assumed the lead, and was doing a devil's dance; one that was especially apt to propitiate all *juju* medicine.

He danced up as if to block the advance of the three white men and the woman. Natchez seized him by the shoulder, hurled him one side and found himself standing before the chief. Tall Tiger sat on a red mat and was staring at the ground, deaf to the riotous confusion, oblivious of the madly capering figures. If ever a man's face reflected an entire loss of hope it was the face of the Tiger.

In the background cowered the women, Indian and negro. Blate, feeling weak and afraid behind his heavy coat of tan, bustled forward with an attempt at a trader's arrogance when dealing with an underprivileged people, and in his best Hacha Hallowaggi voice spoke to the chief. Being ignored by the Tiger he demanded of an ancient man:

"What is it? What's happened? What's bad here?"

The old man stared bleakly at the speaker, and deflected his gaze toward the ground. So intently did he look downward that the whites did likewise, as if following the direction of a sign post. On the ground between the chief's crossed legs was a tiny gold image of a two headed eagle.

Natchez stole a glance at McCarty. The Irishman was fumbling in his pockets. Natchez seized his wrist to stay his groping hand, and drew him back.

"How did that damnable thing get there?" he whispered.

"May the saints be good to us!" mumbled McCarty. "It must have fallen from my pocket. I kept one to show on the sly to the childer. It's gone!"

Enko swayed from side to side, repeating some black formula. Suddenly he wheeled, and as one black hand shook the chief by the shoulder, the other with dramatic suddenness pointed accusingly at the white men.

CHAPTER X

THE FIGHT OF THE MEDICINES

BLATE was the first to react to the very imminent peril. Before the chief could thoroughly recover from his astonishment, the trader had thrown out his arms and hurriedly driven the refugees inside his cabin. Then the village exploded. As if receiving an awaited signal there arose a wild cry of hate and fear. Blate, with the possible exception of the girl, stood in the least danger. Yet he displayed the most fear.

His hands trembled as he took from his pack a Spanish flag. He stood as if benumbed. The animal cries of the red people, punctuated by the demoniac yells of the black doctor, swept closer. Natchez seized the flag from the trader's hands and snarled:

"Wake up! Make believe you're a brave man!" With that he stepped outside the cabin and unhurriedly draped the flag from the projecting ridgepole. Over his shoulder he called to the Irishman,

"Señor McCarty, step out here, please. We must face this mob."

McCarty, with an agonized glance at the daughter he feared he had doomed to worse than death, drew his knife and with stark gaze offered it to the girl. She gestured for him to keep the weapon and whipped a tiny dagger from her garter and held her head high, her chin thrust forward.

"By all the saints yer a braver McCarty than I be," he hoarsely exclaimed.

With that he leaped through the screened doorway and stood beside the Kentuckian.

It was the flag, and not the white men, which caused the check of headlong advance. The might of imperial Spain was forbidding the onslaught. Some of the leaders had long memories and recalled what their forebears had told as to Spain's punishing power. Tall Tiger, as one already doomed to die, slowly came on, his eyes set in a fixed stare, his steps mechanical, as one walking while asleep.

Enko was superlative in his exhibition of malignity. All the accumulated resentment of his people seemed to find expression in the contortions of his misshapen body. He squatted low and danced stiff legged. He was demanding reprisal for all the atrocities practised upon his race. Runaway blacks, venomous with hate for what they had suffered as plantation beasts, tore branches from trees to serve as whips, and shouted their intention of lashing the whites to death.

McCarty raised a hand for silence, and his magnificent voice rose above the babel as in the Creek jargon he warned:

"You are makin' a very bad medicine. Have witches given you a drink from the poison tree? Have you met the Big-Ax-Spirit while he was choppin' down trees with his head? We are your friends. We have a strong medicine. He has a bad medicine. He can not make it do as he commands. It will turn around an' eat him up. He told it to kill the bullet in his gun. It made two bullets out of one, an' killed the chief's dog. Will red medicine follow a black medicine? Remember

that this white medicine is a very big medicine."

He paused and touched the flag over his head.

The mob halted, and became so many questioning individuals. Warriors exchanged interrogations with the flash of an eye. Tall Tiger appeared to be hesitant. He believed he already was doomed, but his loyalty to his people had lost none of its burning zeal.

McCarty refilled his lungs, and continued:

"Tall Tiger will live out his years, if he acts wisely. His heart never sinned against his medicine. Let him sweep the shadows away with a new broom. His white brothers will help him." In an undertone he muttered to Natchez, "If that don't stop them, then the McCarty has wasted his voice an' made his throat ache."

The warriors hesitated, awaiting the command of their chief. Blate, crouching at the end of the cabin and, intending to break through and flee to the forest when the natives assaulted the entrance, cautiously cut a slit in the leafy wall. He spied on the nearest cover and endeavored to decide on just what course he should take did he live to get that far.

While silence was taking the place of the Irishman's oratory, with Fate apt to tip the balance either way, the trader's distraught gaze caught a flash of color at the mouth of the jungle trail, a flash of red just inside the tunnel. It was neither tropical flower—for it moved—nor the wing of gorgeously tinted birds. He turned his head and involuntarily cried:

"The pirates are in the growth behind us! They are coming here! I can see their red flag!"

Natchez instantly caught the significance of it all and whispered from the corner of his mouth to the much perspiring McCarty. The Irishman lifted both hands as the black witch doctor edged close, and cried:

"My medicine tells me a new danger comes here. White men come, who rob both red an' white. The Seminoles need

the help of the men they would foolishly kill."

As an echo to his warning a woman screamed shrilly. There was a general turning of heads. From the mouth of the trail emerged Razill and White Hand. Then came Wolf-face, Old Jack and several other white men. Behind these walked a dozen stalwart negroes. The last were armed with clubs and knives. The white men carried guns.



TALL TIGER stared at the newcomers as if they were ghosts of a strange race. Then he thrust aside his personal fears and stalked haughtily forward. Enko, ever seeking an advantage, danced ahead and was the first to reach the white men. He blocked the narrow path with his monstrous contortions. Razill struck him over the head with the barrel of his gun and sent him reeling from the path. Instantly the pirates became the center of attention and the front of the refugees' cabin was deserted.

"If we only had our horses we could make a dash for it," groaned McCarty.

Blate's spirits leaped high.

"Razill and his followers will stand in with us! The negroes will follow their lead if they give gifts to make Enko's sore head well."

"They'll surely kill me if they can," said Natchez. "Señor McCarty, take your daughter into the bush and find two horses and ride."

"And leave Natchez to be killed," added the girl.

"I'll overtake you and your father before you've covered ten miles."

"Whist!" rumbled McCarty, yet wishing the girl were safely riding to the north, regardless of who might remain to die. "There be new cards for everybody now. I never believed I'd be glad to see the bloody devils!"

The procession came to halt once it was clear of the growth. Enko was back to his dancing. Razill faced Tall Tiger and haughtily announced:

"The white men must have quarters

and food. Their blacks must be fed. We come to help you whip the men from the Tennessee Fire."

Tall Tiger, beset by divers emotions, replied, saying that white friends were always welcome and would be sheltered and fed; that white people already were in the village.

Blate was the first to leave the cabin. He ran swiftly to meet the newcomers. To Razill and White Hand he talked rapidly. A crooked smile played over Razill's evil face. In a loud voice he proclaimed:

"Señor Blate, your friends are my friends. Let them put aside their fears and join us."

McCarty's tawny hair seemed to bristle. He rounded the cabin and strode forward, ignoring the Seminoles. He halted a few feet from the newcomers and in a dry, crisp voice said:

"Yez spoke by the book, Razill, when yez said we had nothin' to fear from yez. But walk with care, or even the McCarty can't save yez."

"Why, brother McCarty, there never has been bad blood between you and me," said Razill, his voice silky but none the less venomous.

"We be play-acting, Razill. We happen to be on a stage that's filled with lots of dangers . . . My white wampum covers my friend an' daughter."

"The beautiful señorita here?" exclaimed Razill, his keen eyes stabbing searching glances over the reds and blacks.

"What luck! What luck!" hoarsely cried White Hand, as he beheld Natchez turning the corner of the guest cabin. "As I live! The very man Tattooed Serpent is so keen to find!"

Natchez was near enough to hear the exclamatory outburst. As he came up to the group he said:

"I am on my way now to have a talk with Tattooed Serpent. As to your being lucky in meeting me down here, it all depends. Cherokee Doctor and Black Caesar believed in their luck."

On the pretense of wiping the sweat from his brow, White Hand removed his

hat and took time to gaze at the tiny red flag, worn as a cockade.

"My banner is the rifle," informed Natchez, as he patted the stock of his piece.

Enko now was among the blacks who came with the pirates. They were in deadly fear of him. He crouched low and danced among them, slapping their frightened faces, then seizing a woolly pate to force back the head so he might glare into the terrified eyes.

Razill was quick to note this demonstration. In all seriousness he told McCarty:

"We white people may have to forget differences and stand together. All the blacks are under the thumb of that little beast."

"You've lost control of your blacks?" anxiously asked Blate.

"It would look like that," sullenly replied Razill. "If they accept his medicine they'll die very bravely. Some of them don't understand that we are not to blame because the rest of their number died of suffocation in the hold of the schooner, and had to be thrown overboard to the sharks."

"They be rank hathens if they can't overlook a little thing like that," said McCarty soberly.

Another, called Fire-face, spoke up, and complained—

"Afore we do anything we oughter settle with the younker for the mischief he's done us."

"Aye, aye, mates," approved Wolf-face. "Let's light a battle lantern and start with a clean score."

"We'll vote on it," grimly added Old Jack.

Razill turned a face of wrath on them.

"This comes of bothering to save you scum. White Hand and I should have left you adrift with the niggers. Keep the hatches down, or I'll drop a slow match into your magazines."

Blate, haggard with a new fear, begged:

"Oh, let us be united and not split up into factions! Already the blacks are a unit. The Seminoles always are a unit.

I and my friends are a unit. If we whites fail to stand shoulder to shoulder we will be wiped out. Tall Tiger, plus the blacks, can do for us with clubs inside of five minutes. We'd have a chance to shoot our guns but once. I know Seminoles can fight. And they all have guns."

Razill recognized the truth of these statements, but countered, saying:

"You seem to need us more than we need you, Blate. We find this camp in confusion. What has happened? You were hiding in a cabin. You were badly scared when you ran to meet us."

Blate twisted and squirmed, unable to deny the pirate's assertion. He confessed—

"Something was found, Razill, which makes the Seminoles very dangerous."

"Whist yer noise, fool," growled McCarty.

"It's as bad for them as it is for us," insisted Blate. "They stand under the same danger that we stand under. Razill, that Enko, black witch doctor, whom you struck with a gun, has complete influence over all the blacks living here. He has won your blacks as followers, and has great influence over Tall Tiger. If that isn't danger enough, then something was found which makes our common danger ten times greater."

Natchez drove an elbow into his ribs to still his babbling tongue. But the trader was too frightened to take the cue. He was desperately anxious for the white men's cooperation. His voice squeaked, as he went on:

"A little image of gold was found. Had no head. It seemed to send them all crazy. The black devil, Enko, took advantage of it to demand the death of all whites."



RAZILL took two steps backward, his jaw sagging. Blate believed the man was afraid; and thought highly of his own wisdom. White Hand's voice was unsteady, as he whispered:

"Headless gold doll! Then that an-

cient yarn's true! There should be thousands of them!"

He sucked in his breath and glanced at the men behind him, and noted their rapacity. Wolf-face moistened his dry lips and endeavored to speak, but could only gulp. Old Jack stood with mouth agape, his wide eyed glaring at the trader.

"Who dropped that gold doll?" whispered White Hand. The pirates crowded together about the trader to catch his answer.

Blate opened and closed his mouth like a fish out of water. Neither McCarty nor Natchez betrayed any concern. The latter said:

"Who knows who dropped it? Tall Tiger, very likely. The dancing black devil, possibly. Any one of the Seminoles, perhaps."

"One of the little gold dolls!" softly exclaimed Wolf-face, clicking his teeth over the words.

"Thousands and thousands of 'em! Gawd!" came from Old Jack.

Razill was the first to regain his composure. He glared warnings at his men and said:

"One thing at a time. First problem to consider is how to keep on living. We've lost our niggers. If they side in with the Injuns we're finished." He spoke almost casually.

"I can control the Seminoles," said McCarty, and the absurdity of his claim caused Blate to blink and almost believe him. "But what if the blacks feel independent an' keep by themselves, with Enko as their leader?"

"Then the Seminoles will keep their hands off of us," Razill promptly replied. Let's get settled and talk it over later. We'll learn how far our blacks have withdrawn from us."

"The crack you gave Enko cost you your blacks," said Natchez.

"We have ways of bringing them back," grimly assured Razill. With a complete change of voice and bearing he turned to McCarty and genially inquired, "We are to have the great pleasure, I suppose, of

gazing upon your lovely daughter, McCarty?"

"She's takin' her siesta," said McCarty.

"It's a great gift, to be able to sleep when older heads are fearing great trouble," remarked Razill, his gaze fixing on the cabin where the girl was concealed.

"Adios, till we meet again," affably said McCarty.

Razill and his band left the edge of the woods. The blacks remained with the witch doctor in the growth. McCarty and Natchez wheeled and glanced back to see what a sudden clamor was about. Enko was visible on the hem of the jungle and was briefly haranguing the blacks from the schooner. When he finished the blacks prostrated themselves, face to the ground, and their new master danced among them and upon them and shouted a gibberish which no white man could understand. Blate was still tarrying with Razill.

When McCarty and Natchez entered the cabin they found Isobella crouching in a corner, the tiny dagger clutched in her hand. Her father brusquely ordered:

"Put away that needle, my child. What the divil be you thinkin'? Is the McCarty here, or isn't he? Here is a brave lad, the one man in the United States General Jackson would trust with important business. Is he on guard here, or isn't he?"

Natchez winced, as he wondered how Old Hickory would estimate his worth as a messenger. The girl concealed the small weapon, but her eyes continued to blaze with fear and anger.

Natchez tugged at his red hair and sat down on a cushion of dry grass. He told the girl:

"It's a mighty queer situation, señorita. Blate is plumb scared and seems eager to curry favor with Razill and his friends. We whites are split into two camps; Razill's blacks have deserted him, and now are under the spell of that frog, Enko. Tall Tiger will hold his people close. Your father and I must decide which way we will jump."

"It's already decided," insisted the

girl. "We must stand with Tall Tiger. He is a gentleman, even if he believes foolish things. We must go there before the pirates join him."

McCarty could not agree with his daughter. With a heavy shake of the head he told her:

"The Tiger will accept the help of five rifles instead of our two rifles. Enko will travel with him if he travels with anybody. The little devil is cunning enough to boss this part of Florida."

Natchez impatiently jumped to his feet.

"We must do something besides talk. You two remain here. Our situation is simply this: we must have the help of the Tiger. He's honest even if a heathen. We must turn him against the pirates . . . Remember the gold we lost at the lake?"

"Oh, I do! But thank heavens it wa'n't the big batch."

"Your mind is asleep, my friend. Drink no more of Blate's rum. Stay here with Señorita Isobella. I'll be back soon. My errand isn't dangerous."



NATCHEZ walked briskly toward the Seminole cabins. The pirates were camping some distance from the village, and in the shade of a giant cypress. The smoke of their cooking fire curled lazily in the faultless blue heavens. Blate was with them, standing apart. From his frequent gesticulation the Kentuckian deduced that the trader was striving to clinch some argument. Natchez did not pause at the chief's house, but continued to where some red lads were testing their agility in jumping. Natchez halted and waited until the chief's son saw him and came to him. The youth's eyes were somber. He greeted—

"I show children how a warrior must jump."

"It is good. They say the son of a chief should do something to bring him great honor," said Natchez gravely.

"The sun is dark for the chief and for the chief's son," gloomily replied the youth.

"The clouds must be driven away. The chief's son must use his eyes in finding something. Did he use his eyes when he went with warriors to bury the dead Seminole men in the north?"

"He used his eyes. He saw many things."

"He counted the tracks of the men who killed?" pressed Natchez.

The boy eyed him with a suggestion of contempt. He answered—

"He counted the tracks of white men."

"Would the chief's son know those tracks again?" persisted Natchez.

"Is my father's son a fool? One track he will always know."

Natchez made marks in the dirt between his feet, and said:

"Your white brother saw something he will remember. Can a chief's son make marks?"

The lad, now barely able to conceal his growing excitement, rapidly made marks in the dirt, and said: "One of the men left a mark the others did not leave. It is here." And he pointed to the ground.

"Which foot?" prompted Natchez. The boy thrust forward his right foot. Natchez praised him, saying, "The son of a great chief has sharp eyes."

"The white man's medicine is trying to tell him something," eagerly said the boy.

"It is telling him that something may be found which will kill the bad medicine that fell on a great warrior. Your friend will look at the ground between your feet."

With that Natchez advanced and beheld the outline of a right foot, the heel of which contained the same marking of lucky stars that the Kentuckian had observed after discovering the murdered Seminoles.

"Your medicine is strong. Come here."

The boy ran to him, and Natchez pointed out the track he had drawn—the same the boy had described in the dirt.

"The ground is wet in places. The white men walked about, leaving many tracks. They say a big medicine may be

found there. But go like a boy playing a game. Not like a hunter."

With flashing eyes the youth remembered his red finesse and circled about, attempting to catch huge butterflies. He was some minutes in making the distance, nor did he once, so far as Natchez observed, direct his gaze at the ground. Natchez continued his stroll, and he was surprised to behold Razill leaving the cabin of the chief. He remained behind a tree until the pirate reached the white camp, when he turned back and came upon Tall Tiger squatting in the shade, holding a trade mirror while one of his wives braided his hair and decorated it with eagle feathers.

There was an ominous glint in the Tiger's gaze as he glanced up and beheld the Kentuckian. Instead of asking his caller to be seated on a mat he remarked—

"Bad birds fly about the village, saying many things."

"Bad birds tell a great warrior lies about his medicine," said Natchez.

The chief sullenly warned—

"The man from the Tennessee Fire is in great danger."

"Men from that Fire are not afraid of danger," replied Natchez. "Where is the false medicine man who walks like a frog?"

The chief gazed toward the camp of Enko and his followers, and answered—"They say he will find something which should not be in this village."

He changed his position so his back was toward his caller. Natchez accepted his dismissal and passed on toward the negro camp.

When he came to the edge of the growth he almost fell over a negro who was prostrate before a whip snake. The serpent easily could have been mistaken for a lash. Natchez lifted it with the toe of his moccasin and tossed it aside. Instantly the black was erect, attacking with a knife. Natchez gave ground rapidly. The black, believing he was afraid, advanced eagerly. With a hitch-kick Natchez leaped from the ground, and the foot, which the negro was not

watching, struck the wrist and sent the knife spinning into the bushes.

To precipitate a fight, however, was the last thing the Kentuckian desired. With drawn pistol he walked away and rejoined his friends. McCarty was quick to tell him:

"Blate insists Isobella should start with him tonight and ride for the Hatcha Hallowaggi. He believes tomorrow will be too late."

"He is a coward. The señorita should never ride with such."

"Bravo, Señor Natchez!" the girl softly applauded.

The Kentuckian added—

"But I do believe your daughter should ride with you, sir, at the earliest opportunity."

"If we can ride, why can't you?" demanded the girl.

"One should keep behind to watch the back trail."

"I never leave my friends to be killed," gravely replied the girl.

In the Creek idiom Natchez warned McCarty:

"Take her away. Make her go."

"He will tell all you say so slyly, once I have him alone," quietly warned the girl.

"Tush, tush!" gloomily said McCarty. In the idiom Natchez had used, he added, "The pot boils over."

"Tall Tiger is up to mischief, if that's what you're hiding," shrewdly spoke up the girl. "His son has been prowling at the back of our cabin."

"I'll swear the young divil got inside an' went through my pack," added McCarty. "But there's nothin' in it now for anybody to find, praises be!"

An explosive cry from Tall Tiger's camp brought them to their feet. The girl shrilly warned—

"The pirates and Blate are running to the Tiger's cabin!"

"You two stay back," said Natchez.

The blacks were stringing in from their camp. The outlaws were advancing in a compact body, with Blate bringing up the rear and ostentatiously waving the flag of Spain.



THE chief, holding a huge, iron studded club in one hand, watched them. His warriors were awaiting the word which might hurl them all to destruction. Wolf-face was carrying something wrapped up in a red cloth.

McCarty whispered to the Kentuckian—

"What do yez make of it?"

Natchez halted and replied:

"Something is about to bust loose. I believe we will have Enko to thank."

"There's the Tiger's boy, comin' on the run," murmured McCarty.

"We must not hold back as if afraid," warned Natchez. His glance at Isobella gave her a cue. She draped the lace shawl over her head and advanced. Her father demurred—

"She'd better stay back."

"Not alone while Razill is in camp," said Natchez.

On the chief's left, importantly endeavoring to fill the whole picture, and only restrained by the scowling glances of the white men, pranced Enko. The blacks were massed behind him, the whites of their eyes showing as they turned their heads from side to side. That they implicitly believed in the black mountebank was obvious even to the careless gaze. The pirates were grouped directly in front of the chief, and the latter both feared and resented their presence. Natchez and the McCarty's halted on the chief's left. Tall Tiger raised a hand for silence, and said:

"All good men, red, white, or black, always find a mat and a kettle of fish and meat in this camp. Bad men are hit in the head, or driven away. The Northern Fires now bring a red ax. We want no enemies here. A white man sends a talk to Tall Tiger, saying he found an enemy's trail ending in this camp. That man will now talk."

White Hand stepped forward and began speaking, Old Jack acting as interpreter. In substance he said he had visited the Irishman's cabin and had found it empty. As he turned to go away,

he said, he had seen an open pack. There was something in it which he believed a great chief should know about. With a low bow he advanced and placed in the chief's hand something wrapped in a red cloth.

The moment the chief's fingers contracted on the small object he exhibited fear and loathing. He hastily dropped the cloth and its contents. As it struck the ground he gave a yelp of alarm and stepped backward and stared in horror at what White Hand had given him—one of the smaller and more insignificant of the headless images.

McCarty was the first to react. He leaped forward and shook his fist at the pirate, and loudly proclaimed;

"This man is a murderer, a liar an' a thief! He thinks to make a chief believe that white is black. Tie one of my arms at my back an' give me a knife. Let him have two knives, an' I'll cut the truth from him. Or put him to the torture an' make him tell where he got it!"

Enko hopped forward and came close to the Irishman, and made derisive gestures. With a rumbling roar McCarty swung his mighty arm and lifted and hurled the black doctor into the ranks of the pirates, bowling two off their feet. Tall Tiger gave an order and at once the braves advanced and fenced the Irishman off from the blacks with a circle of fish spears. To McCarty he said—

"If this bad medicine was found in your pack you shall die from sun to sun."

Razill lifted a hand to secure an audience and told the chief:

"My friend does not know who had the bad medicine. He saw it, and took it, and gave it to Tall Tiger."

Enko again advanced, still working under his new frog medicine, and pointed at McCarty and shrilly denounced him as being guilty. The chief glared at the accused, and started to give an order to his spearmen. His son came to the front and signified his wish to speak.

The chief gestured for him to be silent, and ordered—

"Go and sit with the children and the women."

The lad maintained his position, his pride terribly wounded. He haughtily replied:

"Your son will not sit with women or children. He will take a new name. He has done a man's work. He will speak. The chief will listen."

Striving to conceal the great pride, now burning like fire in his veins, the chief sternly said:

"He shall speak. But if he speaks like a boy he shall be whipped."

"The son of Tall Tiger will not be whipped," replied the youth. "He went with the warriors to bury the Seminole men in the north. He saw where men, wearing white men's boots, hid and shot down our warriors. He found a track like this."

He knelt and rapidly drew the outline of a boot in the dirt. He marked five stars in the heel. Pointing to what he had sketched, he told his father:

"The son of Tall Tiger this day found tracks in a wet place near where the white men camp. He found the track of one of the white men who killed our warriors." And he pointed dramatically at the imprint, and then at the pirates.

Tall Tiger advanced, his spear half raised and glared at the telltale clue. The pirates rapidly fell back. Razill whistled in a peculiar fashion, and Enko and all the blacks ran to join him and the fell brotherhood.

A woman obtruded on the notice of the chief, contrary to all red etiquette, and shrilly shouted;

"White men and black men have taken the guns! We must fight with spears and arrows!"

"Stay here with the Indians," Natchez told McCarty; and he ran rapidly to the cabin to secure the packs. The inevitable split between the different groups had come. It was black refugees and pirates against the three white and the Seminoles. As Natchez was running from the cabin he heard Blate crying:

"They hold me for ransom! Tell McCarty I am a prisoner, held for ransom!"

CHAPTER XI

THE HOSTAGE

WHITE HAND had a white cloth tied to the end of a spear. He spied Natchez near the isolated cabin and changed his course and waved the flag energetically. To make sure he should not be attacked he loudly proclaimed—

"I bring a flag—a truce."

His companions had thrown themselves down in the shade of the giant cypress and near the big supper kettle. A few rods away the blacks formed a second ring. White Hand advanced with a show of boldness. Natchez called a halt when the man was within twenty feet of him; and said:

"You'd look more natural carrying a red flag. Name your business smartly."

White Hand earnestly replied:

"You and your friends are perfectly safe here. We bear you and McCarty no ill will. White men should stand together."

"Meaning that you folks don't feel oversafe with so many blacks around you, ready to cut your throats once Enko gives the word."

"A cursed spider! We'll step on him if he rolls even one eye. You have wrong notions about us."

"Never mind. Give your talk," urged Natchez.

"It's a matter of ransom."

Natchez's brows went up.

"I didn't know we'd lost any of our friends," he said.

"It's Blate. The boys feel that he's played a double game. Some have old trade grudges against him. Razill and I can't control them. They want to see the color of his blood. We figure he can be useful to you and your friends."

"How?"

"By helping you to get out of the Floridas. Once you reach the Hacha Hallowaggi your real troubles begin. Hills Hadjo and Tattooed Serpent will never let you reach the States. But Blate can handle them. The boys will

let Blate ride north with you for five hundred dollars. That's cheap enough for what Blate can do for you."

"Blate is a coward," Natchez leisurely replied. "He can do nothing to help us. And we have no money."

White Hand smiled indulgently and said:

"We don't care what form the gold is in. We'll call it money."

"You speak as if gold was in various forms. What do you mean?"

"I had in mind the little gold images. Without heads," murmured the pirate.

"And what happens to Blate if you don't get the ransom?"

The outcast shrugged his shoulders and drew a finger across his throat.

"Some of the boys will have it so," he regretfully added. "The niggers are keen for it."

"We have no gold," repeated Natchez. Suddenly he aimed the rifle and warned, "Both hands well up. Go back at once."

White Hand turned away, brandishing his leprous arm and warned—

"You've had your chance."

Natchez was convinced he would be doing the cause of humanity a great service if he shot the man. But he had received him under a white flag. He contented himself by calling after him—

"You can escape being hanged by Jackson by coming within rifle shot of me again."

Natchez hastened back to his friends and repeated the truce talk. Isobella was strongly in favor of ransoming the trader. With a wink at Natchez her father said:

"They'll never harm him. Just a game. So, yez'll talk no more about it, sweetheart."

Tall Tiger had the keen vision of outdoor people. In a low sing-song he announced:

"They are planning something. They move about with quick steps."

Suddenly the black circle erupted into the open, and a score of Enko's followers were racing toward Tall Tiger's cabin. The runaway slaves discharged their

muskets, the lead flying wild. When the advancing horde separated enough to afford the whites a glimpse of the squat figure, McCarty seized Natchez's rifle and fired. The African, as if gifted with prescience, dropped flat on his face as the gun exploded, and the small bullet drilled through the heart of the man at his side. Instantly the others fled to cover, screaming with fear. The witch doctor scurried with many leaps from side to side after his black brothers.

Tall Tiger ordered the women and children to fall back into the swamp. To McCarty he said:

"My brother killed the wrong man. The black man has a strong medicine."

"His medicine can't laugh at our bullets. He's afraid of us. Your warriors should have killed him before now."

"He has a bad medicine," gloomily insisted the chief. "My fighting men should be hitting the Northern Fires in the head with an ax. Now we must hide in the swamp. Our white brothers will go with us?"

McCarty replied:

"We must take the white woman north. We must have three horses."

"My son will bring you horses."

The enemy's camp was suspiciously quiet as the shadows increased. Natchez remained near the cabin to guard against a flank attack. The moon was dimmed by a pall of clouds, and it was difficult to detect motion in the open ground. The silence was first broken by McCarty's voice shouting—

"They be shooting poisoned arrows, or darts!"

Natchez endeavored to sight an enemy, but could see nothing. McCarty held his fire for the final defense of his daughter, should the blacks break through.

Razill cried for the whites to go in and rally the blacks. Two men burst from cover at the other end of the cabin. One of them complained—

"How can we bag the girl if the blacks won't keep 'em busy?"

Then did Natchez understand the real purpose of the night attack. With

Isobella in their power the pirates could dictate what terms they chose. Natchez yelled;

"We've got 'em! Come on!" He punctuated his boast with a shot from his pistol, and the two men took to the growth. Natchez raced back to his friends, frequently shouting his own name to escape bullet or spear. The moon wallowed clear of the clouds and revealed the opening to be empty of life. The pirate's camp-fire was extinguished. Tall Tiger, victorious, without the loss of a man, stamped about in a circle and sang a strong medicine song. To add to his elation his son came in and hurled a white man's scalp at his father's feet. Beside it he tossed a boot of Spanish leather, with a lucky horseshoe in one heel.

"My son met a dog in his travels," said the chief.

"The dog who stole from the *to-hop-ki*," said the youth.

This affray caused McCarty to change the plan of flight. The horses were nearby in the woods. The Irishman insisted on immediate departure. The Tiger ordered that the animals be brought up and a large package of food prepared. The horses were quickly saddled.

When they were two miles from the village, Natchez told his companions of the demand for ransom.

"We do nothing for poor Señor Blate?" asked the girl.

"Nothing. He was ahead of us here. He must run his own risks," said Natchez.

"He didn't need to join the pirates," added McCarty. "He's a coward."

As the sun rose the heat waves were almost intolerable. They found an alcove in an island and arranged a shelter for the girl. She was asleep without waiting to eat the bread and meat. Natchez beckoned to McCarty and pointed to an isolated clump of white cedar.

"Whist! Don't I know? It's where we planted the Auld People's gold. Bad luck it may be bringin' my little girl."

"Go back to the señorita and watch

out for snakes. I'll remain here and watch for two legged snakes," said Natchez.

"They'll come after us hot-foot, thinkin' we'll lead them to the gold."

Natchez seized McCarty's arm and pointed to the south.

"The sun glare's in my eyes. I see only a buzzard or two," said the Irishman.

"There's a thin stream of smoke on our back trail," said Natchez.

"It's heat waves."

"I'm not mistaken, McCarty. It's a smoke. A signal. Look! They're using a blanket to break it up into pieces, like I've seen the Kanza Injuns do!"

The Irishman was puzzled to interpret the meaning of the dark puffs rising high and suggesting a message sent in code.

"But it can't be the pirates. If they be on our trail they'd never stop to build fires. An' there's no answerin' smoke."

"It must be one of their scouts, sent out to follow our trail. He's talking to the band behind him," said Natchez.

"I'll ride down there an' cut him off behind his ears," fiercely declared the Irishman.

"They'll be in the saddle by this time. They'll run their horses to death to over-haul us. Your daughter can't stand the hard pace that you and I can endure. I'm afraid we must change our plans. If the pirates don't catch up with us the Seminoles ahead will have seen the signal and will be on the watch."

"Wurra! It will be sorry hearin' for the poor childer. But she's a McCarty, thank God!"

CHAPTER XII

A REPORT FOR THE GENERAL

NATCHEZ, speaking rapidly, told his companions:

"We must dig up the gold. You and Señorita Isobella must take it to our old camp by the lake and conceal it. Don't try to carry it along with you. Paddle east, or south."

"I know the lake. The southern side merges with the Everglades," said McCarty. "They'd never find us down there. An' I might run into Tall Tiger's band."

"I'll get through to Jackson and come back to you."

"Why the needless bother of digging up the gold, Señor Natchez?" asked the girl.

"I must have some of the small images."

"Take it all, señor," urged the girl. "You have earned it many times over."

"The Irish blood talkin'," groaned McCarty. "Generous to a fault."

Despite the drama of their situation Natchez barely could smother a smile. He gravely told the girl:

"I want a few of the little images to drop along as I ride. So much bait for the enemy to find and to keep them on my trail. Now we must work fast!"

He stared north, fearing he would behold an answering smoke to the smudgy message now being written in the southern sky.

Using their hunting knives, Natchez and McCarty soon exhumed the treasure cache and the Kentuckian thrust half a dozen of the tiny images into his pockets. The rest were securely tied in a blanket and placed on a horse.

"You ride away and leave us?" said the girl, as the horse was led into the lake path.

Natchez was hurt to see sadness replace the usual vivacity in the soft eyes.

"Oh, but I'm returning—with some riflemen. I wouldn't be riding north alone if it was safe for you two to go with me."

"My friend, you never show fear," said the girl gravely.

"Señorita, I'm scared blue most of the time."

"He's taking the gold to draw the dogs after him, sweetheart," said her father. "While they be chasing north after him we'll be floating in a roomy boat on the big lake an' living a life of ease."

"But he's taking all the danger!" Isobella complained.

"No danger," insisted Natchez. "Leave the second boat on the west shore. If you're afloat I'll need it. Picket the horses where they'll have plenty of grazing."

"You think even of the horses," said the girl. Her face was tragic as she clasped his hands in both of hers and solemnly said, "Before God and the saints you are the finest gentleman, next to the grand *caballero*, I ever met."

Natchez felt tremendously awkward under her praise. He thrust out a brown hand to McCarty. That grand *caballero's* parting speech was—

"Ain't we had the divil's own time together?"

Natchez leaped on to his horse and rode to gain more open country. He emerged from a grove of trees a mile from the spot where they had recovered the treasure. He could see nothing of any pursuers in the south. He dismounted and waited. His plan, as a decoy, called for the pirates to discover him and give chase.

The country was dotted with the wooded "islands". His position permitted of an uninterrupted view down a narrow lane for a considerable distance, and it was at the extreme limit of this perspective that he expected to behold the bobbing dots of horsemen. The smoke signal in the south was thinning and soon would cease. Climbing into the saddle, the Kentuckian stood to increase his range of vision. The open stretch, however, remained empty of humans. He feared that the miscreants had scouts far ahead, who had seen him and his friends ride toward the lake.

"If they don't show up soon I'll go back," Natchez told his horse as he dropped to a sitting posture.

A fierce chorus of triumphant yells smote his ears, and he was amazed to behold horsemen. While he had been watching the slot of open country, the

enemy had taken a course west of his position, but parallel to it, where their advance was concealed by the various islands. Although taken by surprise the Kentuckian for once rejoiced to behold the brutal brotherhood. He lifted his horse into an easy gallop, and allowed an image to fall in the trail where it easily could be seen.

Muskets boomed, but he heard no whistle of lead. He did not return the fire, as his last desire was to discourage the pursuit. When the horsemen were near the spot where he had baited the trail he half turned and watched them. For a bit he feared none would discover it. Then one was swinging low and scooping up something which he triumphantly displayed to his companions. Muskets blazed again, and this time Natchez heard the heavy balls flying overhead. He quickened his pace. For a mile the outcasts rode in a bunch; then one of their number forged ahead. He was flogging his mount unmercifully and rapidly widened the distance between himself and his mates. Swinging in behind a small island, and out of sight of the lusting pack, Natchez slipped to the ground.

Shortly he heard the strumming of swift flying hoofs. Wolf-face tore into view, his mount in a lather and ready to collapse. He was surprised to behold his quarry waiting for him. He leaped from the saddle and landed on the turf with the agility of a cat and snapped his pistol. The weapon failed to explode. Not wishing to accelerate the speed of the others with a shot, Natchez dropped his rifle and leaped forward, his knife point a tiny wheel of fire.

Wolf-face panted like a spent runner because of the belief he was about to kill and win much gold. For thirty seconds the two rapidly revolved, first one and then the other being the axis of the circle. Then Wolf-face's savage scowl changed to terrible exultation. He shifted his style of attack. Stepping quickly from side to side he began driving Natchez backward in a straight line.



THE Kentuckian was puzzled, then alarmed. He was maneuvering in a way which suited his opponent. He endeavored to circle, but the man was blocking his way and pressing back without risking a foot to foot climax. Thus far the slithering blades had given neither any advantage. Wolf-face persisted in his inexorable purpose. Natchez endeavored to take and maintain the offensive and ran into a defense so solid as to cause him to wonder if the episode was about finished, unless he resorted to the pistol in the back of his belt.

The pirate's eyes dilated with awful expectancy. Close to Natchez's heels sounded a vibrant *whir-r-r*. With every ounce of muscle he leaped high and backward, and the moment his feet touched the ground he was springing to one side. Even as he was performing these wild gymnastics he saw the coils of mottled death released, and five feet of deadly venom struck the pirate's leg, inside the knee.

With the falsetto scream, hideously ludicrous when emanating from such a man, the pirate slashed the snake in two, leaving the fanged head attached to his breeches. Natchez swung into the saddle. The outcast, with frozen eyes, stared at the reptile's head. Then he went berserk and grabbed for his pistol.

"Better save it for yourself," cried Natchez as he went over the side of his horse. "To die the other way is hell!"

Then he was galloping away, bending low to escape a possible bullet. He heard the report of the pistol, but no lead pursued him. He glanced back. Wolf-face had cheated the poison.

This still picture of the terrible tragedy was quickly obliterated by the arrival of the rest of the band. Razill dismounted and opened the dead fingers, and squawked with delight as he recovered the headless image. He shouted to his companions:

"After him! He has a bushel of these gold dolls!"

Enko's big mount carried the least weight. Razill gave him an order. The

black rode to the west, speedily racing from view behind a long stretch of hibiscus. This magnificent herbaceous annual, standing a dozen feet in height, stretched to the north in what appeared to be an endless wall. Natchez could make but one interpretation of this maneuver. The black doctor was riding in the hope of retarding his flight, until the white killers could close in. Natchez dropped another image to bait his back track.

He saw one of the men dismount and pick up the piece of gold. The others gathered around him, but when they renewed the chase they did so at a moderate pace. Natchez shook the reins and sped on. The whites were not striving to overtake him. He concluded their change in pace was the result of confidence. The thought worried him.

Another mile and the whites were out of sight, with the trail running through a fairy growth of dogwood, intermixed with the clean, straight smooth stems of the pawpaw. The air was raucous with the scolding of rooks, flapping their ebony wings around the crown of one stately pawpaw. Natchez reined in to breathe his animal.

Jays and parakeets now added to the confusion. A woodpecker on a tree nearby paused in its staccato hammering and looked sharply at the stationary horseman. The bird, satisfied the strange quadruped was harmless, resumed its drilling, the vibrating head becoming a blur of action. It again attracted Natchez's attention by abruptly ceasing its labors. He glanced upward. The driller was as motionless as if carved from wood. Then, to Natchez's amazement, it fell to the ground. He dismounted to investigate what was a mystery. He was astounded to behold a tiny arrow, or dart, protruding from the bird's back.

Natchez leaped behind his horse and heard the soft swish of some missile close to his ear. He threw up his rifle and, with feverish intensity glared at the trees.

The angle at which the dart had

struck the bird gave him a clue. The tiny arrow could have come only from the green cap of the giant pawpaw. It seemed impossible that any creature could have climbed that smooth, silvery trunk. But a monkey might have achieved the ascent. A monkey? Enko!

There was the slightest agitation in the green crown. To forestall another dart Natchez brought his rifle to his shoulder and fired. The whip-like crack was the signal for convulsive motion in the heart of the green plumage. Next he beheld Enko's squat form. A black arm went limp; one claw of a hand released its grip on a hollow reed; the muscles of the wiry legs relaxed, and the creature was a black streak, falling to the ground. Natchez's hands trembled as he reloaded his rifle. His departure was hasty, and furious.



RAZILL was the brains of the fell band. White Hand easily came next to him in malevolent ability. The others were vicious fighting machines, but lacking in astuteness. Enko had been in a class entirely apart from the others. Physically he was insignificant, but as leader of black fugitives, and as the possessor of secrets pertaining to magic, he was to be feared under certain conditions. Wolf-face was the brute type, ferocious and feral at all times.

When the western sun was flooding the flat country and Natchez was trying to decide where he could camp for a few hours with the minimum of danger, the pursuit took on a new complexion. A small band of Seminoles, riding from the west, joined the outlaws.

After a brief parley the red men seemed to welcome the whites. Then did the Kentuckian know his work was cut out for him. The red men would run his horse to death long before he could reach any haven of security. And he could ride no farther until his horse had rested. To secure a wide view of the country in the south he climbed a majestic oak and from a lofty perch picked up his pursuers.

They and their red allies were stationary, and were close enough for him to discern the gestures made by the whites. He became convinced the two bands were arguing some point of strategy. A white man extended his hand, and the Seminole leaped back as if beholding a mud-asp.

"One of the gold images!" softly exclaimed Natchez. "He's offered to give it to the Injun if the reds help to catch me."

A second survey of the band satisfied him the Seminoles were afraid of the image. With absorbed interest he watched for the next move of the mixed band. The red men were gesticulating and rapidly withdrawing.

Natchez descended to the ground, once more feeling quite capable of dodging the pirates until his horse was rested. He led the animal through the wide grove to a similar piece of cover in the west. There he slept. He awoke near sunrise. His horse was cropping the grass and fit for another hard day. Natchez ate of his cooked meat and bread and renewed his journey.

Throughout the remainder of the trip he met with but little hindrance. Several times bands of Seminoles passed him, hurrying on to fight the men from the Tennessee Fire. To all such he spoke of his friend, Tall Tiger, and of Razill and White Hand. He was accepted as being one of the human derelicts constantly drifting down into the peninsula to escape the white man's law. His travel stained Spanish finery was an additional passport. He was amazed to find he had encountered no trouble, but he did not attempt to deceive himself as to the possibilities ahead.

As he neared the Hallowaggi he came within the zone of Hillis Hadjo's influence and enmity; also within that of Tattooed Serpent. He proceeded more cautiously.

On arriving at the trading post Natchez learned from Blate's helper that Jackson was at St. Marks, that he had arrived at Fort Scott to find the troops starving,

and had given orders for the Army to live off the country.

He secured a fresh horse and covered the trail between the two rivers to find American soldiers encamped where he had fought the duel with the fat man from Tortuga. These would have handled him roughly because of his Spanish dress had he not proclaimed he was a courier seeking Jackson. Still suspicious, the men accompanied him as far as the general's tent, where he gave his name to a sentinel. His escort turned back once Old Hickory's stentorian voice was heard.

The sentinel emerged and closed an eye with much eloquence. Inhaling deeply and squaring his shoulders, Natchez passed inside the tent. Jackson, using a barrel head for a table, suspended his writing and glared at the young man.

"You finally decided to return and report?" There was something ominous in the low pitched voice.

"The first opportunity I've had, sir."

"What the devil do you mean wearing the clothes of Spaniards?"

"A necessity, sir. Also a help. Have we declared war on Spain?"

The question was couched in all honesty, but for a moment the general suspected insubordination. His tawny hair fairly bristled. Natchez realized he was making bad medicine, and he was quick to add—

"Where I've been I've heard no news since traveling south."

"Since traveling south? So completely lost that you have nothing to report?" thundered Old Hickory.

"It's hard to tell it all in a mouthful, sir. But I've completed your business, except to deliver this, a communication from Blate, the trader." He fished out the soiled missive and gingerly placed it on the barrel head.

"By the eternal! I'd say this had been the length of the Spanish Main," rumbled the general. "Huh! Could I have received this earlier it would have helped some. Did you, or did you not understand that you were to be expeditious,

and were to return and report to me at Nashville, or along the road to that city?"

"That was my plan, sir. But much happened to prevent me. I was in trouble all the way down from Nashville to this post. It was known I was coming. Smokes behind me talked to smokes ahead. Attempts on my life were made several times."

"Huh? Attempts on your life! How do you know that?"



NATCHEZ briefly recited his adventures with those who attempted to assassinate him before he reached the Florida border. He added:

"It was known in Nashville I was coming down here on your business. The news traveled ahead of me. Spies followed me. I always was between two smokes."

"Didn't anything happen to those who opposed you?" growled Jackson.

"Captain Fan—"

"A cursed, bloody pirate!" interrupted the general.

"Was. I killed him in a knife fight, out there where the men are sitting."

The bushy brows went up.

"So? That is good work," acknowledged Jackson.

"Black Caesar is dead."

"Huh! So you did learn that much. Or is it merely hearsay?"

"He was eaten by a shark, at the mouth of the Calusahatchee, sir. Right after we had fought El Toro."

"Damnation! You talk as if you'd been to Old Mexico! And those Spanish rags."

"Black Caesar was El Toro. I was the *toreador*. All the pirates were there. He was frightened because his *juju* medicine didn't help him in that fight. He leaped into the bay."

"Go on. How happened you were so far south?"

"Seeking Señorita Isobella McCarty's father. We were chased by dogs. We barely managed to reach Blate's station where we changed to Spanish dress. We

traveled south with Tall Tiger and his small band after the pirates planned to kill them. As I'd left the girl in the Tiger's camp I had to go along. Besides, Hillis Hadjo and Tattooed Serpent were after me. The girl left the protection of the Serpent's village to go in search of her father. I had to go, anyway, to find McCarty and give him your warning."

"What's this El Toro business mean?"

Natchez described the conflict, and unconsciously became quite dramatic as he told of the finish of Cherokee Doctor and the flight up the river. Jackson pushed his writing aside, rested both elbows on the barrel, and with his strong chin propped in his palms, he helplessly ordered:

"Too much of this that doesn't hitch up. You begin at the beginning. You possibly don't know that I've hanged Arbuthnot from the rigging of a trading schooner and have had Ambrister shot."

Natchez's eyes bulged. This was not the genial gentleman he had parted from at Nashville, but a fire eater, ridden by numberless bothers and worries, and surrounded by foes who worked against him in the dark. The Kentuckian began his recital and had reached his first meeting with the girl, when Jackson softly exclaimed:

"Ha! McCarty's daughter enters the scene. By the notches I've already made on the chine of this barrel I deduce you've killed quite a few men before you fairly reached this post. But this woman, the renegade's daughter?"

"One of the most beautiful ladies one ever saw." It came so voluntarily, and was spoken with such sincerity, that Jackson sharpened his gaze and stared speculatively.

"Like that, eh?" he murmured. "Get along with your story."

With his bronzed face on fire, Natchez made haste to complete his narrative. When he finished painting McCarty as a "good American," the general added, softly—

"With a beautiful daughter!"

When Natchez paused to draw a deep breath, his inquisitor asked—

"When you went treasure hunting you were derelict in your duty, weren't you?"

"An American woman was in danger. While saving her I was following your orders to find her father. I satisfied myself her father is a good American. McCarty and I had to go to the lake, as it was absolutely necessary for the safety of the white woman that we should not lead the pirates to Tall Tiger's town. Then we had to return to the Tiger's village, and took some of the gold images along. They served me well, as they are big medicine to the Seminoles. Tall Tiger was afraid of them. He took to the Everglades and will not bring any fight to you."

"I believe I've assembled in my mind all that you have told me. But why did you fail to bring McCarty north?"

"His daughter could not have made the trip without being captured. As it was I was chased for the greater part of the distance up here."

Then Natchez entered into details, and again the general was too interested to interrupt him. The death of the duelist by a snake bite, and the death of Enko, caused his eyes to flash. In concluding Natchez said:

"My return north was a race. I couldn't have made it if not for the gold images."

General Jackson drummed his fingers on the barrel head and murmured:

"The black in the tree, poisoned darts, the rattlesnake at your heels, the fight with Cæsar, all are dramatic. But let's review what you've really accomplished. You bring me, belatedly, Blate's letter. You failed to ransom him, which you should have done. You warned McCarty; he denied the charge. But he is not here to face me. Now hear me with both your ears. I believe McCarty has fooled you. We will bow low to his beautiful daughter; but he fooled you. It was all important that Blate should be here. You did not bring him."

"We did not have the gold in the Tiger's village. We couldn't have ransomed him if we had wished. If we'd had the gold

they never would have let him go. They would have made new demands. The Indians were drawing back into the Everglades. We two men would have been wiped out and the girl captured by as godless men as the sun ever shone on. I managed to escape alone. I couldn't have made it if the girl had come with me. I couldn't bring her father as he must stay to protect her."

As he paused for breath the general exclaimed:

"Damme, but you talk in circles! You sound like a Yankee lawyer. I can't put my finger on any one act of yours and prove you were wrong. But I believe you've made a mess of the whole business. You should not have allowed yourself to be encumbered with a woman. Two men I want, and you fetched neither. McCarty and Blate. The first has placed his profits above the welfare of his country. He should hang. The latter has kept me well informed and has done us good service. He should be rewarded. Now I must send a file of riflemen to bring those two men north."

Natchez, his face doubly hot, if that were possible, thrust out his chin, and pleaded:

"Give me two weeks' leave. I'll fetch 'em north, or I won't come back. I started the job. I should be allowed to finish it. If I can have two weeks—"

"Two weeks!" snapped the general. "Very well, sir. You shall have two weeks. Fetch those two men and the young lady to my headquarters. If you succeed we'll see if you can't do a bit of soldiering. When do you start?"

"Tonight, sir."

"Well, well. You've just got here. I believe you're entitled to a night's rest. And, by the way, when you fight an armed man, who is endeavoring to murder you, don't be too punctilious. If you have a pistol, and he already has snapped one at you—shoot to kill! If your hide is worth a damn, save it! You are free to depart any time, but I advise a night's rest. Good night—good luck, Mr. Rodney, or Natchez. I shall expect to see you two

weeks from the time you start south."

Natchez saluted and turned to go. The general came to his feet and ordered—

"About face!"

The Kentuckian snapped to attention. Jackson leaned across the barrel and thrust a hand as he said—

"Tennessee men needn't always be too formal." Natchez shook the proffered hand. Resting his hands on the barrel, the general said, "Remember, Blate and McCarty are wanted by me, here, or wherever my headquarters may be. And I shall be happy to be presented to the very beautiful young lady."

Then he was on Natchez's side of the barrel, a hand clamped on the latter's shoulder, his face as fierce as a hawk's, as he instructed:

"Never, so long as you live, debase the punctilios of the duello by extending such courtesies to the raging heathen and cut-throats. There is a place for the code; but not among thieves and murderers. When you fight scum, fight to get the obnoxious business over with as quickly as possible. Rest the night. Start tomorrow. Come back unharmed. Good night and good faring."

CHAPTER XIII

THE TROURLE SMOKES

WHEN Natchez would have put up for the night at Blate's trading post the helper was much perturbed. In an agitated whisper he warned the Kentuckian:

"Men were asking about you when you left here to find General Jackson. Your Spanish clothes fooled them at first, or you would have been attacked before you could reach St. Marks. Governor Luengo pretends to be friendly to all Americans, but he was a friend of Arbuthnot's. He'll never forgive the hanging of that man. It's now whispered that Jackson plans to ship Luengo and all the Spanish officials to Pensacola. If that's done the pot will boil over."

"I'd think you would be in danger," said Natchez.

"I work for Blate, who is well liked. I'll not be harmed. But they'll have your hair on a red pole if you don't watch out. Ride by night as much as you can."

"I thank you for your warning. I'll leave my horse and take a fresh one."

It was late afternoon when Natchez suddenly left the shelter of the post and saddled one of the several animals picketed close by. A group of Spaniards eyed him wrathfully. They considered Jackson's activities, since he penetrated the country, to be very high handed and unwarranted. There were phases of the invasion which were to re-echo through the halls of Congress until a resumption of the war, some fifteen years later, was to drive the Seminoles into the Everglades where they were destined to remain, a "lost people," for nearly a century. This journey was much different from that taken with the McCarty girl and Tall Tiger's band. Then Natchez's safety was assured by the presence of the Tiger. Now his hair would be drying in a hoop once he fell into red hands.

After much riding and hiding he arrived one morning at the edge of a cypress swamp, where the trail split. One fork continued southeast through the growth, while the other branched to the south and into more open country. He identified it as being the spot where the Seminole scout took fright at the moss and grass disguises he and McCarty had worn to scare red intruders. The southeast trail led to the Okeechobee.

Natchez was startled by beholding a smoke ahead. He knew its source must be very close to the north shore of the lake. He experienced the greatest of fears. The smoke must mean that Seminoles, or Razill and his band, were camping on the lake and signaling their friends in the north.

Natchez rode furiously to kill the smoke, or to be killed. Reason returned when he had a fourth of a mile to go. He slipped to the ground and, with rifle ready, hastened on afoot, the horse following. At last he could glimpse the fire

through the growth and the figure of a man beside it. He drew a bead on the man and called for him to throw up his hands. The fellow wheeled about and Natchez yelped with amazement on beholding Blate. He ran forward and kicked the fire apart and cried—

"In God's mercy how did you get here?"

Blate appeared to be somewhat abashed by the Kentuckian's arrival. He shrugged his shoulders and replied:

"By no help from you. I escaped from the pirates. By luck and accident I came up here and stumbled upon the McCartys. Why did you spoil my fire?"

"Why'n tophet did you make a smoke to call Injuns here?" As he asked the question, Natchez kicked the smoking embers into the water.

"Look here!" cried Blate. "There's a smoke in the north. McCarty and his daughters are on the lake, east of here. I make a smoke to warn them of danger."

"Idiot! You've called the red devils here!" raged Natchez. "To think of you, an Injun trader, doing such a thing in a hostile country!"

"But they had to be warned," sullenly insisted Blate. "I run the risk of being killed by making a smoke to keep death from them. I'm thinking you've treated me poorly."

"I'm trying not to think how the seño-rita will fare if your smokes brings enemies. How did you get here?"

"Seminole from Tall Tiger's camp brought me. I stumbled upon the McCartys. They wanted me to stay."

"Just where are they? I must find them at once. Hell's to be paid, now you've made that smoke."

"In a boat. Toward the east. There's another boat. "Blate pointed to the lake where the bush growth hung over the water.

Natchez lost no time in securing the craft. Blate asked—

"What news from the north?"

With his own ill temper somewhat appeased, Natchez gave a brief account of the situation at St. Marks. He resented

Blate's presence as it would hamper any attempt to run the McCartys through the enemy's lines. The trader was highly pleased when told of Jackson's concern for his safety.

"I have my value even if I don't go in for stabbing folks," he remarked.

"I give you credit for being of some value to General Jackson, but down here you're a nuisance. And, remember, it's the stabbing, shooting critters who will take you back north in safety."

Blate was thinking along another theme. He said—

"McCarty says this is near the place where you got the treasure."

Natchez, now busy with the boat, glanced up quickly and asked—

"Did he tell you who guarded it?"

Blate shook his head, his eyes puzzled.

"He said it came from the lake. Who could guard it?"

"Maybe it was the devil. But I'll row you over the spot. You can strip and dive down and fetch up a headless image."

"I wouldn't go down there for all the gold in the world," mumbled Blate.

"I'm starting to find the McCartys. Why did they leave this spot?" asked Natchez.

"I don't know. They wanted me to stay here and make a smoke if I saw anything that looked bad."

"McCarty must have lost his head!"

"He appeared to be in his senses."

"Where's the Seminole who brought you up here?"

"Went with McCarty. He can return to the Everglades from the south shore of the lake."

Natchez immediately felt much better about his friends, now he knew one of Tall Tiger's braves was with them. He took the paddle and handed the long pole to Blate, and the two were soon afloat. Natchez pointed to the illuminated patch ahead and explained—

"Light reflected from white roofs of the sunken houses. We cleaned up about everything outside of that dark hole."

Blate shivered and ceased looking down over the side of the boat. He mumbled:

"Razill would have the courage to do it. He'd face the devil for gold—or a woman. You arranged for a relief column to come down and take us north?"

"No. I'll take you north. Arbuthnot was caught by Jackson near St. Marks and hanged."

"Good heavens! What a bloodthirsty man!"

"Ambrister wasn't hanged. He was shot," added Natchez.

"He'll have England and Spain on his back! Ambrister was in the English marines."

"He's in hell now, if he did what they say he did to stir up this war," mused Natchez. "Lean on that pole! We must travel faster."



THEY poled and paddled, and at times they worked out some distance from the shore, so as to sight any smoke from the grand *caballero's* fire. When several miles down the lake and well out from the shore Natchez happened to glance back over his shoulder. Immediately he growled:

"A thousand curses on your thick headedness!" He pointed toward the camp where a column of smoke was rising into the blue sky. "If we get caught in a wring you'll have to look after yourself. McCarty and I will save the girl."

"I'm of more importance to Jackson than you are," replied Blate, speaking with unexpected warmth. "I've looked after myself ever since I came down here. I fixed it so you got away from my trading post with the girl."

"Leave be," growled Natchez. "I admit that, so far, General Jackson hasn't a very high opinion of me as a scout."

"Let's not jaw any more. What do we do when we catch up with the young lady and her father?"

"Take them to Jackson's army as soon as we can. I don't understand why they should go away in a boat."

"What if Indians swarm in here and bag all of us?" asked Blate.

"We'll try to get to the Everglades and

find Tall Tiger. He would protect us, I think."

As they proceeded along the north shore of the lake toward the east, Natchez asked:

"How long have they been gone? Where were they going? Why did they go?"

"Several hours. They didn't say. I don't know."

Blate tried to get him to discuss the Old People, but the Kentuckian had but one thought in his mind—to find his friends. Over his shoulder he snapped—

"Did they take any provisions?"

"Not a mouthful that I know of. I supposed they would be out for a bit, and then come back."

By this time the sun was in hiding behind the crown of the western woods, but the heavens overhead were brilliant with light. Blate, standing and using the pole and facing the east, suddenly exclaimed:

"Two small smokes ahead, along this bank. What do two smokes mean?"

"Trouble, if they ain't cooking fires." Natchez came to his feet and stared in the direction of Blate's pointing finger. There were two distinct smokes. "They'd never build two cooking fires," he mumbled. "You're sure they came down this way?"

"Watched 'em out of sight, being sort of lonely and wanting company. They kept quite close in. Not so far out as we are—but that white something. Looks like a wall."

Natchez now saw it. It resembled the masonry of the Old People which he and the girl had seen farther north. He turned the boat inshore where the shoal water permitted use of the pole to the greatest advantage. As they drew closer to the white walls Natchez observed that the ruins extended into the water as though the ancient village had been partly inundated.

"They must be inside the walls," said Blate. "If they'd heard, or seen us, they'd be showing themselves. If they are in trouble we'd better move faster."

"That's good sense," agreed Natchez;

and he redoubled his efforts with the paddle.

Blate added much to their speed by putting his shoulder to the pole and walking the length of the craft. In fact, so speedily were they cutting down the distance, Natchez called on his companion to reduce his efforts.

The white walls were within pistol shot when Natchez directed the trader to head straight for shore. But Blate walked the pole and the boat skimmed along close to the walls. Now they could see it was behind and near the ancient masonry that the smoke originated.

"Stop poling!" cried Natchez.

"But your friends? They must be there. They made the smokes. You are keen to reach them," said Blate.

Natchez examined the shore sharply. He was puzzled that his friends were not on the lookout for help. With only Blate to depend upon for aid, unless friendly Indians should enter the lake from the vast swamp lands in the south, Natchez could not understand why McCarty should expect a signal to be answered.

"Whoever made the smudge must have gone away and left it," said the Kentuckian in a troubled voice. "It may be a Seminole decoy."

"McCarty certainly came down this way," Blate insisted.

"Something is moving in the bushes in front of the wall!" Natchez warned.

"Looks like McCarty," exclaimed Blate in a shrill, nervous voice.

The growth suddenly parted and three white men stood on the bank, their rifles aimed at the boat.

"Razill, White Hand and Old Jack!" cried Natchez.

"Merciful heavens! Must I be their prisoner again?" moaned Blate.

"You coward! That's why we wouldn't ransom you," snarled Natchez. "Use that pole! Shove us into the bank! I can stand them off if I can get a bit of cover!"

"Come along! Come along!" ordered Razill.

"Don't shoot!" yelled Blate; and instead of sending the boat to the nearby

bank he shot it ahead toward the three pirates.

"Drop that rifle!" roared White Hand.

Natchez confessed defeat by sitting in the bottom of the craft and wondering how it could have happened thus. And where could his friends be?

The boat nosed into the soft bank. The Kentuckian leaped ashore. From a mass of bushes a hand darted forth and snatched away the rifle. The pistol and knife were appropriated with similar deftness. At the top of the bank Natchez glanced fearfully down into the enclosure formed by the ruins. He saw nothing of his friends. He turned to speak to Razill and saw him shaking hands with Blate. The latter was grinning broadly. With the scream of a catamount Natchez hurled himself upon the traitor; then the world dropped from under him and inky darkness blotted out the sunshine.

CHAPTER XIV

THE PRICE OF GOLD

WHEN Natchez came to his senses he was lying on a split palmetto floor of a Seminole house. His arms and legs were tied. It required a few moments for him to recall just what had happened. Then he was struggling to burst his bonds that he might find Blate. Finding his efforts futile, he called out lustily.

Steps sounded outside, and a figure stood in the doorway.

"Got your wits back?"

"Yes. I'm tied too tightly. Cut me loose."

The man laughed.

"Oh, certainly we'll set you free."

"Then he approached and groped and, locating the prisoner's head, struck him him with the palm of his hand. The smack of the blow was heard beyond the entrance. A voice shouted:

"Stop pounding that man. I'll do the beating."

It was Razill speaking. His voice had a peculiar quality which one seldom forgot. He entered and demanded—

"Why are you striking our guest, Blate?"

Natchez was doubly enraged to learn his assailant was the treacherous trader. He answered for Blate, saying—

"Because he's a coward and would never dare do it if I had a hand or foot loose."

"The abuse I've stood from him," muttered Blate.

"Hands off till you get orders," warned Razill. Then to Natchez, "Are you ready to talk?"

"Certainly. Several questions I want to ask."

"I'll answer them if you will tell me certain things."

"Where's McCarty and his daughter? In this hell hole?"

"Not yet. Blate bungled that part of his job."

"I never knew they were setting out till they were in the boat." Blate anxiously defended. "McCarty wouldn't let me go with him. What could I do? Shoot him? You said I was to learn where he had hidden the gold."

"And you didn't learn that, blunderer," cut in Razill. "Lucky for you that you brought this prisoner. He's almost as good as McCarty."

Natchez knew they were telling the truth, and a great burden rolled from his soul. He asked—

"Do any of you know where McCarty is?"

"The south shore, in the big swamp," said Razill. "Now tell me where you hid the gold."

"I didn't see McCarty hide it," said Natchez.

"We have some medicine which will loosen your tongue."

"Try fire," eagerly suggested Blate.

"I can't tell what I don't know. If tortured I'll tell anything to make you stop. But it won't be the truth," frankly said the Kentuckian. "What will you do with me?"

"We'll make you do some work for us. If you do it well we'll turn you loose."

"It's dark. I can't see you laughing,"

said Natchez. To his surprise Razill's voice was almost genial as he said:

"I'll make a light and fetch you some supper. No need why we should quarrel when a little gold will cover our differences. You got yours. Help us to get ours and we'll be quits."

Natchez was quick to indulge in similar amiable hypocrisy. He readily replied—

"There must be plenty of gold for all of us if we can find it."

"That's the spirit," heartily replied Razill. "Blate, you fetch some food and a torch. Our friend must feel faint. And remember your manners."

Blate scurried away and soon returned with a light and some roasted fish wrapped in green leaves. Razill raised the prisoner to a sitting posture and untied one of his hands, but secured the other behind his back. As he deftly worked he sympathetically murmured:

"I'm very sorry to do this, Natchez. By and by I'll turn you loose, knowing I can trust to your common sense. All we want is gold."

"And what if I can't help you find any?" asked Natchez between mouthfuls.

"I'll be frank with you. You'll feed the fish and eels and everything else that lives in this damnable place, just as surely as the sun rises in the morning."

"I'd be a fool not to trade," Natchez readily agreed. "If I have my freedom I won't be any worse off for your having a ton of it."

"You're the most sensible man I ever met," declared Razill. "I believe you'll soon remember where you and the Irishman hid that gold."

"Razill, I've told you the truth. I have no idea where he hid it. He hid it after I rode north. He and his daughter came to the lake. He had the gold. What he did with it I do not know. I came back to find him. I found Blate. McCarty got suspicious of him in the Seminole camp. He set off with the girl in one of the two boats. I was busy riding north."

"You rode well," Razill grimly said. "We found Wolf-face and the rattler. We found the nigger and his blow-pipe."

"We'll have another gold talk later on."

Natchez finished the fish and found it good, although it lacked seasoning of any kind. The pain in his head lessened and his wits were sharply acute. It was an immense relief to know the McCartys had not been captured. Razill waited patiently and then said—

"Now for a little gold talk."

Natchez promptly volunteered:

"I'll show you where we found it. I believe more is there awaiting the man who will take it. I told Blate about it and offered to let him get some, but he was afraid."

With a side glance at the entrance Razill whispered—

"Is that true, Blate?"

"True? I suppose so. More'n twenty feet under water."

"That doesn't sound so promising for a man pretending to be truthful," warned Razill.

"Did you think it was lying around loose on top of the ground all these years? It's there. On the bottom of the lake. We got it by diving. Take me there and I'll go down and fetch up a piece. If you haven't guts enough to go after it I can't see how you'll get it."

"You almost sound like a truth teller. We may give you that chance to work for us."

"Some big snakes down there by his tell," broke in Blate. "Big enough to do for a man."

"Is that true, Natchez? Or just a yarn?"

"We saw such a creature. It nearly got McCarty. I spoiled one of its eyes with a knife, and it let go."

"You've got guts!" said Razill. "You'll go down for us. I'll try it if you come back alive. I'd go to hell for gold."



BLATE was uneasy. He feared he would be called upon for some such work, and the prospect appalled him. He suggested:

"What's there won't be taken by any one else. Before trying in the open lake let's make a try around here. Where

they dived for gold were white walls, like these near here. No reason why gold should be in one part more than in another."

Razill appeared to be in good humor. Natchez took the opportunity to tell him:

"I'm helpless, and you can easily kill me. But I'll do no work for you if I'm to be trussed up in this fashion. Tie me at night, but not too tightly. Better yet, post a man with a loaded gun to stand guard over me. I must walk around in the daytime. Otherwise I won't work."

Razill agreed:

"I can't see any danger in that for us. Man behind you with a loaded gun ought to keep you in line. If we snag McCarty and the girl I allow you'll remember where he buried the gold."

"I couldn't tell to save her life. Her father could, and would."

Razill retied Natchez's hands and brought a folded blanket for his head to rest on. He ordered Blate to stand guard until relieved, and departed. Blate was uneasy. After some five minutes of silence Natchez said—

"General Jackson is keen to see you."

"To hell with Jackson! I've fooled him to the hilt. But that game's played out."

"You've got more brains than any of these other men," murmured Natchez. "But you haven't any courage to profit by them."

"I'm alive, and not tied up," sullenly replied Blate. "I can think circles around them. If you'd shown me how to get some gold you wouldn't be here now."

"You'll die by the knife, Blate," prophesied Natchez. "You're so scared of cold steel a knife is sure to finish you."

The trader hissed like a snake; and because he feared the prophecy and hated the man for making it, he raised his hand to strike. Then he remembered Razill's warning, and his cowardice stopped the blow. He attempted to defend himself by saying:

"I am a trader. A trader must take a profit on what he trades."

"Cut me loose and give me your knife, and we both will slip out the back end of

this house. And I'll put you in the way of finding gold."

"Hunt for it with them dogs around? You must think I want my throat cut."

"Do you think for a moment they'll take you out of this forsaken spot? No, no. They'll leave you behind."

The trader breathed rapidly. He huskily said—

"Wish I'd never come here."

Old Jack came in to stand guard, and Blate plunged from the house and into the glow of the camp-fire.

Old Jack seated himself on the floor, cocked a long pistol and growled—

"You're in a hell of a fix, young feller."

"So are you," retorted Natchez.

"You're surrounded by dangers you don't know about. At least I know the worst."

"What dangers?"

There was no doubting the man's physical bravery. The Kentuckian sought to weaken his courage by a more insidious attack than he had used in frightening the trader.

"The Old People, who had a village here, whose ghosts haunt this lake and the surrounding country."

"I never see no ghosts."

"You'll feel them. I've seen them rising out of the water, under the white moonlight—"

He broke off abruptly as the rest of the band trooped in to get clear of the clammy mists and out of sight of the vague, wraith-like forms now hovering over the dark waters.

Razill approached, and in a very business-like manner secured Natchez's arms and legs. Natchez protested at the cruelty of it. Razill told him:

"No freedom at night. None of the boys want to stay awake to watch you."

That night were so many hours of continuous torture. Never did the light of early morning have greater appeal, although it might bring death. Razill came to Natchez shortly after sunrise and removed all bonds. After a breakfast of fish Razill told him:

"You're free to come outside. I will tie your arms loosely at the elbows. You

can use your hands to some extent. Any foolishness means a bullet."

On leaving the cabin Natchez found Fire-face waiting to take charge of him. This outcast bluntly warned:

"I don't like this job. Make a move to escape and you'll get a hunk of lead."

Natchez believed this. The men stared at him wolfishly as he took his place before the fire. Each believed the prisoner held the key to the treasure secret. Each burned to torture it from him. The thong, passing from elbow to elbow across his back, permitted him to use his hands and forearms.

Razill indulged in ferocious gaiety. He dwelt in detail on Blate's technique in tricking the Kentuckian. The trader did not relish this sinister praise. Especially distasteful was the manner in which it was presented. Razill addressed him directly and demanded:

"It's true, ain't it? You came to us in the Indian camp and offered to work with us in finding the gold?" Each question carried a threat. Blate bowed his head in assent. Razill continued, "You told us how you'd fool General Jackson with false reports, didn't you?" Again the wretch confessed. "You said you'd keep us posted as to any loot to be picked up from those who came to trade with you. You said you would put us on track of runaway slaves from the States that we could return for a fat reward, and then steal again. That's true?" Blate dumbly nodded his head.

Turning to Natchez, Razill explained:

"I want you to understand that this man is as great a villain as you ever met; but he lacks nerve to do much more than lay plans. He's good at planning murders, but he doesn't like to watch any blood letting."

"Stick a knife in his leg an' he'd squeal like a hawg," mumbled Old Jack. "He'd agreed to decoy McCarty an' his gal into our hands."

"I can go back and find them," cried Blate.

Razill grinned evilly and slowly shook his head.

"No—you'll stay here."

Blate winced, and his eyes reflected his great fear of the lawless company. From under his red brows Natchez saw all. He was an opportunist when need be. Life had taught him to build with what was at hand. The trader was a great coward, but even so he could be prodded into desperation. The Kentuckian busily cast about for a chance of using the craven in effecting an escape. He sensed hostility between Razill and White Hand. The latter betrayed this ill feeling, Natchez believed, by his fashion of staring steadily at the leader when the other was not noticing. White Hand was no coward. Let the yellow metal be found and then dissension would creep in with the inevitable resulting process of elimination.

The red headed prisoner's problem was to remain alive until the break came.



EVERY man was eager to be about the search for gold. Natchez's announcement of the source of his and McCarty's success turned the band's attention to the water. All walked along the walls of the partly submerged masonry and stared into the murky depths.

Razill called out:

"Blate, you come here. You'll dive down and see what you can get your hooks on to."

The man's fear would have been pitiable had he not been so cold blooded in planning crimes for other men to commit. He babbled wildly, his eyes dilated. There was nothing under the water to reflect the sunlight and, consequently, cowardly imagination peopled the shallows with all sorts of monsters. He began a frantic expostulation. Rough hands quickly seized and stripped him. Finally he was disrobed and pushed to the bank. Razill, grinning like a death's head, slowly drew his knife and ordered:

"In you go. It ain't more'n twelve feet deep. Don't make me jab you. Nothing like fresh blood to call in the 'gators."

He fainted with the long blade. With a

shrill scream Blate dived. When he came up he had his two hands filled with mud and tiny pieces of masonry. Razill made him go down several times before he was satisfied that the lake bottom at that point held no gold.

Old Jack suddenly exploded with a mouthful of oaths, and demanded—

"How much longer is this raree show to last?"

This bit of fault finding contained the germs of revolt. Razill was quick to sense it. He realized he must keep them busy. Without any hesitation he directed:

"Jack, you and Fire-face and Blate work among the ruins east of here. Spread out and look among the walls. White Hand and the prisoner and I will work along the shore. We'll all be back at this spot at midday."

The program was entered upon immediately. Natchez was very active in examining the broken walls of several ancient abodes. He caused great excitement by finding one of the smaller images. He imparted the discovery to Razill, who glanced keenly about. Observing that White Hand was watching him he gestured for his companion to approach. In a low voice, which trembled slightly, and with a sweeping glance to make sure none of the others were in sight, he said:

"The redhead has fetched us luck. See what he found!" He displayed the image and pointed to the discovery spot. White Hand took the image in his palm. Both men eyed it wolfishly, each busy with transmuting thousands of them into haciendas in Mexico, plantations in Virginia, vast estates in Cuba, with women and drink.

White Hand glanced furtively in the direction taken by the rest of the band and winked expressively.

"No use telling the boys. One isn't enough to brag about."

Razill nodded, and told Natchez—

"You keep shut."

"What will you do when you find several bushels, a greater weight than you can carry away?"

Razill wet his dry lips and hoarsely replied:

"There will be a fair division. Each man will take his share."

White Hand, standing behind the speaker, grinned as if amused. Then he was over the wall and was searching deep among the ruins. When he climbed out he had one of the images clutched between his teeth. He displayed it to Razill and then thrust it in a pocket. There was not the slightest doubt in the Kentuckian's mind of the result of a real discovery. It would disrupt the band into two parties, and the members of the surviving faction would rend each other.

For the rest of the morning all three worked assiduously.

When the men met for the noonday meal each party reported no success. Each was suspicious of the other. Not until Razill had taken Blate aside and had questioned him savagely was he satisfied that Old Jack and Fire-face had told the truth.

After a hurried meal of fish and duck, roasted and eaten without any seasoning, the search was resumed. Old Jack and Fire-face were discouraged and loath to labor. Razill and White Hand could not be about the business soon enough. Old Jack, with a quick glance at the two men, asked Natchez a question with his eyes. The Kentuckian closed an eye slowly. The man's face flamed with sudden rage; and as quickly was as blank as a wooden mask.

Natchez went along with his companions of the morning. White Hand, in the lead, gave a low yelp which brought Razill bounding to his side. Natchez proceeded more slowly. Like a man in a trance White Hand was staring down into a hole some eight feet in depth. The walls were partly lined with the white conglomerate. There was much of this débris on the bottom. Natchez believed that in ancient times it had served as a well. The sun illuminated the hole. Water covered the broken masonry several inches in depth, and teemed with the hideous minutinæ of swamp life. A half

dozen of the images were heaped up in the middle of the circular space.

With a choke in his voice Razill exclaimed—

"We've struck it!"

Staring wolfishly at the gold, White Hand replied:

"Yes, I found it. It's a good beginning, but we'll have to call Blate to go after it."

"Are you crazy?" snarled Razill.

For an answer White Hand pointed to a livid form on a projecting bit of the masonry.

"A mud-asp," he said. "None of the boys will go down there. Maybe a dozen more in the crevices."

Panting heavily Razill glared at the gold. His voice was unnatural as he said:

"Natchez isn't afraid of anything. He will go down."

"He will not go down," said Natchez.



RAZILL whipped out his knife, his eyes murderous. He insisted:

"You will go down. We'll remove the cord from your arms. You can kill the snake and toss up the gold."

"Before you can kill me I'll let out a yell that'll bring the others here on the jump. I'm not Blate, you know. If you had any brains you'd get the stuff without sending a man after it. Cut one of those tall canebrakes, split one end, and you'll have a long pair of tongs."

"That's a good talk," heartily indorsed White Hand.

"Some of it is a splendid talk," mused Razill. "And some of it is very unwise."

"A man in your trade can't afford to be sensitive," said Natchez.

Razill quickly attacked with his knife a patch of reed cane that stood nearly forty feet in height. It made some confusion when pulled through the brakes and to the ground. Natchez caught White Hand's eye and shook his head. The latter was prompt to say:

"You've made something of a rumpus. If any of the boys saw the top of the cane threshing about they'll be here on the run."

"I know what I'm doing," said Razill, his eyes half closing. He cut off a section of the cane and slit the end for a few inches. Almost at the first trail he brought up one of the ancient articles. His hands trembled so violently that he had difficulty in removing it from the jaws of the improvised pincers. After the last piece had been secured Razill made them into two piles; four in one, two in the other. White Hand made no move to pick up his share, but stared steadily at Razill. The latter, resting on one knee, returned the gaze for a moment, and then picked a piece from his pile and added it to White Hand's share.

"As leader I'm entitled to an extra share," he said, rising.

"As leader of the band, yes," slowly agreed White Hand. "But this is a private bit of business." He warned Natchez, "Not a word of this to the other men."

"I have nothing to tell any of them," said Natchez.

The search was continued, especial effort being made to locate another "well." In their wanderings they got back from the lake for a quarter of a mile and came to a wide pool covered with a growth of curious aquatic plants.* At first sight one easily could accept it as a soft verdant carpet. White Hand would have floundered into it had not Natchez, acting instinctively, pulled him back.

"Fish and other things are swimming down under that acre of pretty grass-land," the Kentuckian remarked.

Razill stared at the deceptive expanse for some moments. As if speaking his thoughts aloud he murmured—

"What a rare hiding place for a dead man!"

White Hand backed hurriedly away, his thumbs hooked in his belt.

By sundown they were back at the camp. They found Fire-face and Old Jack much discouraged. Blate was very uneasy. When Razill reported complete failure Old Jack glanced at Natchez, who was standing in the background. The Kentuckian again closed an eye.

* *Pistia stratiotes*.

Old Jack shifted his gaze to Razill, and asked:

"What's the fuss you was havin' in that patch of tall cane? Looked like some one was tryin' to climb one of the brakes."

"Probably some animal passing through, or birds lighting on it. We weren't near any tall cane. Kept along the shore all the while."

Three outlaws were suspicious of two. The evening meal was eaten in silence and as one of the men and the prisoner retired for the night, Razill spoke briefly aside to Old Jack and ordered Fire-face to see that Natchez was tied. The Kentuckian complained, but it did no good. Helpless, he pitted his endurance against the cruel pain of the thongs. Shortly after midnight he observed motion at the entrance, but heard no sound. He dozed a bit but awoke when again he sensed motion close to the door. By sunrise the men were up and Natchez's bonds were removed. Fire-face was ordered to guard him with a loaded pistol.

White Hand was the first to notice the absence of Old Jack. He began to ask questions. Razill said:

"He must have gone out early. He'll soon be back. Probably making a search on his own hook."

Natchez noticed Razill's boots were covered with mud and sand. It looked too fresh to have resulted from yesterday's tramping. Blate came along and sat down near the Kentuckian and held his head in his hands. He appeared to be on the verge of a complete collapse. Suddenly he lifted his head and eagerly suggested:

"Let me take the boat and return to McCarty's old camp. I believe I could find that hidden gold."

"The scut's found it and hid it already," accused White Hand.

Razill smiled ironically and told White Hand:

"That's why I'm the leader of this band. I can think. You can't. Is there any human being, not an idiot, and knowing our friend Blate who can believe for a moment he would leave gold up there and

come down here?" The soundness of this reasoning was self-evident.

White Hand scowled at Natchez and said:

"You was sweet on the girl. You were a friend of McCarty's. If he hid it, then you know where it is."

Natchez again explained:

"I rode and left my friend to bury the gold where he would. He was gone when I came back. Your guess is as good as mine."

The men rose dispiritedly to resume their search. Fire-face announced—

"We're tired of hunting in back there." He pointed to the locale covered the day before. "We hone to hunt more to the south."

"We've been over that ground," said Razill.

"Still we want to take a whack at it," stubbornly insisted Fire-face. "Mebbe we'd be more lucky."

"If you have any luck you're mighty welcome," spoke up White Hand.

Razill was too shrewd to oppose the wish.

"If you have any luck, come along once we've eaten," he said.

"If there's a Jonah here, it's Blate," said Fire-face.



THEY were seamen before they were pirates, and they were thoroughly steeped in superstitions. They eyed the trader evilly.

"Tie him up and leave him. Natchez will go along with us," said Razill.

Two men fell upon Blate and, despite his protests, bound him hand and foot.

Natchez was taken along, his arms loosely tied at the elbows. He walked ahead of Fire-face, who came last. All worked together, so that none could secrete gold if he found any. The gold seekers, tortured by insects, oppressed by the heat and punished by thirst, spent four hours without finding any of the precious metal. Believing that any change would be for the better, and realizing he was doomed to death once the

band left the lake, Natchez insisted that gold in large quantities could be found at the bottom of the lake. He suggested a drag be made for combing the depths. He was fighting for time, for something to intervene and change the direction of the path before him. Could he get the men afloat, he would risk a plunge overboard and a race for the shore.

The men went back to camp and found that Blate had rolled close to the water. He managed to say:

"He came back! A dead man walking. Oh, God! What a sight! In the cabin!"

Razill's eyes burned as he turned to stare at the cabin. Fire-face ran to investigate, but halted in the doorway and leaped back, his face craven. In a trembling voice he yelled:

"Old Jack! In there cut to pieces! Devil must have mauled him!"

There was a general rush to the entrance of the cabin. Just inside was the man, dead. Several terrible wounds proved that his return was a miracle of endurance. Natchez pointed at the shaggy head and cried:

"See what's in his hair! Some of the plant buds that grow on that pool where you tried to walk, White Hand. The place Razill said would be good for hiding a dead man!"

"Tie that man up!" roared Razill, his face distorted with passion. "I saw him whispering with Old Jack last night. He told him some story about gold. Jack sneaked out on a false trail. He must have met the devil, or a Seminole. This man sent him to his death with lies. Tie him up."

Fire-face came forward and secured Natchez's hands behind his back and hobbled his feet so he could walk but slowly. Razill, seemingly in a towering passion, ordered the rest of the rum brought out. He released Blate. The latter rose and staggered up from the shore and edged toward the small keg. Razill struck him and sent him reeling. He collapsed close to Natchez and remained inert.

Natchez knew Razill had decoyed Old Jack away and doubtless had knifed him

and had pushed him into the big pool under the floating carpet. He also believed that every man in the band knew the truth, but from fear, or indifference, would not comment upon it.

The Kentuckian cast a glance at Blate and decided the fellow had not lost his reason, as yet. From the corner of his mouth he told him:

"Razill has commenced to reduce the size of his band. He killed Old Jack, but didn't make a good job of it. You're next. Listen. Don't move or speak. We found some gold on our first trip. There's some in Razill's pack. There is some in White Hand's pack. Step back there while they're drinking. Shift White Hand's gold into Razill's pack. They'll fight. That will give you a chance. The men will be watching them. Set my arms free."

"Oh, my God! I dassent!"

"Cut me loose, or I'll say you killed Old Jack. Razill will like that idea."

Blate edged behind him and cut the thong, then walked toward the cabin. Once out of sight of the men he doubled back behind the growth to a position in line with Natchez and the pirates. He stared at the two packs and trembled. To be seen near them was death. As he would have retreated, panic stricken, he remembered the plant carpets spread over certain pools. He could see Old Jack, horribly wounded, crawling from under the carpet and leaving a trail of blood as his indomitable will drove his legs to carry his dying body back to the camp. Grimacing hideously, he opened the packs and shifted the gold. His heart was pounding in his ears and temples as he ran back to the cabin. The cooking fire of coals sent up a faint smoke. Gathering huge armfuls of green stuff he dropped it on the fire and hastened back to where Natchez was sitting.

"I did it!" he gasped faintly.

"Act natural. No one saw you. They've been too busy watching each other to think about you."

"The smoke will be climbing mountain-high, soon."

"Good. No matter whom it calls in, we can't be worse off than now. Brace your nerves!"

The last was prompted by White Hand's act of suddenly walking to where he had left his pack. He was gone some minutes. When he returned he brought two packs.

Fire-face called out—

"Going to move away from here?"

Razill turned and demanded—

"What you carrying my pack for?"

"I went to my pack to get some tobacco. I missed something—some of my property. Razill, I want you to open your pack."

Razill stared at him in amazement.

"Have you gone out of your head entirely?" he asked.

"I'm not drunk, or crazy." He dropped the packs, and added, "I want you to open your pack. I'll open mine."

Razill swiftly stepped to his side, and whispered: "Are you stark mad? If they see our gold—"

"Our gold?" White Hand repeated. "Open your pack. You don't have to show the world what's in it, but I must see."

"You mad fool! Now look sharply—the rest of you stand back."

Stooping, he quickly loosened the straps and opened the pack. Then he stepped back and stared stupidly. White Hand quickly opened his pack and exposed the contents to the view of all. And in a loud voice he roared—

"You thief!"



RAZILL leaped at him with the quickness of a tree cat, but caught a blow that sent him reeling. Razill regained his balance, and methodically stripped off his shirt and wound it around his left arm. White Hand did likewise.

Fire-face recovered the power of speech, and yelled—

"What the devil does this mean?"

"They must be drunk! Separate them," cried Blate.

"I'll kill the first man who gets in my

way while I'm knifing a dirty thief."

With death in his glaring eyes Razill advanced. Blate squawked and buried his head in his arms. Razill thrust. White Hand caught it on his knife and ripped a red line across his opponent's forearm. Then he told the gaping men—

"He had some of my property in his pack."

"Liar!" cried Razill as he gathered himself for a spring.

White Hand knew it soon would be finished, one way or the other. He hesitated none in welcoming close fighting. The two bodies crashed together, each man striving to grab the other's knife hand.

Razill, more adept, succeeded, while White Hand secured only a partial hold. They whirled about twice before Razill could free his knife hand. Then he grunted loudly and stabbed his man through the heart.

Stepping back and panting heavily he thrust his blade into the ground without removing his gaze from Fire-face and Natchez.

"What's the matter with you fools?" he cried. "He picked the fight. I couldn't stand and let him kill me."

Fire-face slowly said:

"Devil seems to have put a spell on this band. We've lost a good man. We weren't so awful strong when White Hand was with us. Old Jack crawled back here to die. White Hand has gone."

Razill paced back and forth, knife in hand, his eyes blazing.

"Who put that gold in my pack?" he roared.

Then he began to examine the men individually. Blate was a coward and half crazed with fear. Natchez apparently had his arms bound at the elbows. Razill drew close to Fire-face and said—

"It must have been you."

"Chief, if I'd known White Hand had that stuff I might have been tempted to pouch it. But I'd never make you a present of any."

"Some one did. I'll kill that skunk."

Fire-face's hand was on his pistol. In a low voice he said:

"I didn't even know you two had any gold. Seems as if you should do the explaining."

Razill was quick to take note of the hand on the pistol. He sheathed his knife, wound some vines around White Hand's body and attached several pieces of the conglomerate secured from the nearest ruin. He then exerted his great strength and hurled the body into the lake. After the splash and the disappearance of the victim, he turned back and glowered at Fire-face.

"You were speaking of asking questions," he said ominously.

Blate stood behind Fire-face. Razill lounged forward carelessly, as if about to do a bit of work which was of no particular consequence.

"You have some questions to ask," he told Fire-face. "I have an answer for them."

The outlaw made no response. His hand was on his pistol, his fierce eyes wavered none as he held his leader's gaze. Without realizing his act Blate pulled a knife. Natchez knew the time was propitious for taking the offensive. He turned and ran swiftly to the cabin where his weapons had been placed.

"Hi! Stop him! Stop him!" roared Razill.

Fire-face grinned wolfishly. It was death for him if he shifted his swift glance for a split second. In a thin, wailing tone Blate cried out:

"Oh, God! He's come back like old Jack did! He'll haunt us till his murderer's done for!"

The weights had slipped from the body of White Hand. The dead man had risen to the surface.

"He's trying to swim ashore!" screamed Blate. This, as the dead man, attacked by something under water, moved grotesquely. "White Hand is coming ashore!"

The expression of fear suddenly showing in the countenance of Fire-face convinced Razill that something most un-

usual was taking place behind him. He stepped back. He was not proof to the urge to turn his head. He gave one glance over his shoulder, and was horrified to behold the dead man swimming. But even as he looked the body was jerked under water, with the leprous white hand flung high for an instant.

Fire-face never overlooked an advantage. He cocked his pistol and yelled:

"Come on, bullies! Board him!"

The pistol snapped harmlessly. Fire-face advanced with his knife. Disconcerted by the terrible spectacle, Razill gave ground. He mechanically parried Fire-face's swift thrusts. Blate circled around to attack from behind. Like a ravening beast Razill leaped at him, the least dangerous of his enemies. Puffing with excitement, Fire-face pursued and shouted insanely as he stabbed his chief in the back. The thud of the blows and the choked cry of execration had a strange effect on Blate. Instead of continuing his flight he halted and stared at Razill. The latter was dying on his feet. Blate, remained motionless, his knife held limply.

Razill was upon him and Fire-face was upon Razill. There was a horrid wheel of stabbing arms revolving for a bit, and then a disintegration. Blate was on the ground, and beside him was his executioner. Fire-face knotted his neckerchief around his slashed wrist, tying the knot with his yellow teeth, and stared blankly at the gory spectacle. By degrees his mind worked back to the quarrel, and he remembered the prisoner. For the first time he noticed the towering column of smoke, now rising high to be glorified by the sun.

"Red flag flying," he croaked. "Hell's to pay—been paid."

He beheld Natchez fully armed, approaching from the cabin. The Kentuckian grinned savagely as he beheld the slaughter.

"See here," mumbled Fire-face. "What do you think you're going to do?"

"I'm going away in a boat."

"I must git my blanket roll and them gold pieces."

Natchez shook his head.

"I'm going alone."

The rôle of captor was quickly resumed by the outcast.

"We go along together, or you stay here with t'others." He nodded at the dead men.

The savage grin remained fixed on Natchez' face. He told Fire-face, with scorn in his voice:

"You and your mates were fools. Blate, coward and traitor, was doubly a fool. You're badly slashed. You're done for."

Fire-face protested:

"No, no. Just scratches. I'm going along with you . . . Damn Razill for pouching a mate's gold!"

Natchez smiled.

"He didn't." And the smile grew wider. "Razill and White Hand were hiding the gold they found. Blate was ready to betray any and every one to get out of this trap. I told him to shift the gold, so there would be fighting, which would even up the odds against me. I'd kill you, but you already are done for. Your blood will turn to poison. Clear the path!"

Fire-face stared as if perplexed; then understanding shone in his fierce eyes. He was slashed and stabbed. He knew what the end must be without even any rum to wash his wounds. He dropped to one knee and snatched a pistol from the ground. Natchez was expecting some hostile move, and he drew his weapon from his belt and fired point-blank. Fire-face, still on his knees, slowly fell forward. Giving no heed to the scattered pieces of gold Natchez ran to the boat and threw in his blanket and arms, and pushed off. Behind him, in the east, rose a weird ululating cry. It was answered by a similar cry from the north. The Kentuckian gazed desperately over the drear expanse of water.

Seminole warriors were inexorably and surely closing in. Already their fighting men must be swarming along the west shore of the lake. The mysterious disappearance of Captain McCarty and his daughter remained unsolved.

CHAPTER XV

RIDING NORTH

IT WAS near sunset, and the smokes in the east had died down when the Kentuckian cautiously nosed his boat into the bank near the old camp. He reconnoitered with ears and eyes before leaving cover. The spot was deserted. Suddenly he found himself whispering—"He would hide it in the water."

Possession of the treasure appealed to him none, yet he returned to the boat and worked it along the bank under the overhanging foliage. He was not surprised when he came upon a rope of braided vines leading from the partly submerged root of a tree into the murky water. He knew the gold was at the other end, but he did not touch it. The discovery, however, did afford him the meager satisfaction of knowing he had correctly reconstructed the carefully planned departure of his friends.

Shifting the position of the boat behind a thick screen of vines and dropping branches, he lay on his blanket and endeavored to snatch some sleep.

Near morning he was awakened by the whinny of a horse. He shifted the position of his rifle and drew his pistol. He heard several horses. After some minutes of waiting he decided to leave his hiding place and investigate, but a more sinister sound killed the desire. It was the soft dip of a paddle. He heard the craft ground just above his position. He dared not disturb his green curtain, yet he could glimpse the square end of a dugout and the blade of a long paddle. He recognized it as being peculiarly a Seminole type of water craft, long and wide, square at both ends and capable of carrying eight men.

A guttural exclamation sent his hand to his rifle. Almost inaudible sounds followed, as if men were lightly landing from the dugout. Then came complete silence. Without any warning his concealment was swept violently aside by the head of a long spear, and three of the murderous weapons slithered over the side of the boat

ready to pin him down. A man leaned forward to see what game had been bagged. To the Kentuckian's great relief he found himself staring into the glaring eyes of Tall Tiger's son. For a moment he went faint from the reaction to what he had believed meant immediate slaughter. Once the youth recognized Natchez his expression changed and he ordered the spears to be withdrawn. He reached forward to grasp the limp hand of the Kentuckian.

"My brother of the Big Medicine has finished his sleep. He will come out and see his friends and eat," he said.

"The brave son of a great chief has taken a new name and is called chief," Natchez replied. "But your brother can not eat until he has found what he has lost."

He cut the vine hawser and pushed the boat into the open. Two Seminole men were standing on the bank, watching curiously. Another warrior was in the dugout with Tall Tiger's son. The latter gravely advised:

"This is a very bad place for a man from the Northern Fires to sleep. My people are fighting the Fire. Two men of my people brought horses here in the night. Ride north."

Natchez sent the boat to the bank, and insisted:

"I must find what I lost before I can ride north. I must—"

He ceased speaking, and with open mouth stared in amazement at the grinning, reckless face of the grand *caballero*, and the anxious, eager countenance of Isobella McCarty. She was wearing her Spanish costume. Natchez was inarticulate as he leaped up the bank and extended both hands to her. The Seminoles frowned on such a display of emotion. The Kentuckian was aroused from his trance by the voice of McCarty, roaring:

"Be I the cat, or a dog? Be I here forinst yez, or be I back in the big swamp? Mebbe I'm dead an' with the holy saints!"

Natchez tore his gaze from the girl and shook hands with the Irishman. He was

too happy to speak. McCarty beamed on him amiably and softly said:

"Glory to God! I never thought to look on yer homely face again. There be horses waitin' for us. There be red devils east an' north of us. But it's now or never. We had the McCarty luck. Ran into Tall Tiger's son the first day in the big swamp. He gave us sanctuary. His old man wasn't glad to see us, but the lad is on his own now. He had to fetch us here, or have his mates turn against him. An' the McCartys never were no hands to break up families. So whether bloody pirates or red savages block the trail, we'll be ridin'."

McCarty became a tornado of activity. He ran to a horse that was equipped with a Spanish saddle and seized his daughter and tossed her astride. The other two animals had no saddles, and a leather strap around the lower jaw served as reins and bridle. Natchez flung his rifle over his back and mounted. McCarty cried—

"Yer forgettin' my weddin' gift to the señorita an' your share of the profits."

With that he turned to the bank and salvaged the sunken gold. It consisted of two packs. He gave one to Natchez and slung the other over his shoulder. Then he mounted and said—

"Now we can ride."

The girl swept a frightened glance around the growth and murmured to Natchez—

"Oh, the wicked men!"

He quieted her fears.

"All dead. Too long a story now."

"Praises be!" exclaimed McCarty. Then, regretfully, "But I should have been there. It will make rare tellin' when the childer isn't around."

It was not a matter of swift riding, but of cautious advances from island to island. Natchez rode a quarter of a mile ahead. On reaching cover he would signal that the coast was clear, and his friends would lift their mounts to top speed and join him. Several times they saw bands of Seminoles trailing north. One morning Natchez, after climbing a tree, reported

several smokes on the northern horizon, with no suitable cover between. The girl insisted they ride on. For her the great horror was in the south.

Natchez turned his gaze to the south, and hurriedly descended to report:

"Injuns are coming afoot at a lope they can keep up for many hours. They are leaving the last island we camped on. West of north is what looks to be a deserted town. It's fortified with the usual stockade of logs in a circle. I saw no signs of life."

"One of their auld walled towns," said McCarty. "I'm thinking their medicine will keep them from it. We'll ride for it."

They pushed their horses to the utmost, and by late afternoon the Kentuckian was preceding his friends to make sure no enemy was in the village. The stockade of logs, stood on end, overlapped on the east side and formed a narrow lane to the collection of cabins within. There were no signs of life. The girl was nearly exhausted and asked for water. McCarty scouted the premises, insisting there must be a spring. Close to the north side he found the grass growing luxuriantly, and soon he had excavated a deep basin into which water seeped. In a short time it was brimming over. He next inspected the empty cabins, and told the young people:

"Somethin' scared the red folks away in a hurry. They left everything behind. It must have been a long time ago. There's no signs of battle. It became a bad medicine place. Glory be that it is so!"



HE HAD knocked over a crane while approaching the village, and this was to furnish their supper. When he produced it, wrapped in broad leaves, Natchez sighed in dismay.

"What's the matter?" demanded the Irishman. "Isn't crane meat good enough for starvin' folks?"

"Almost as good as duck. But you dressed it as you rode along. If the savages we saw below the last island come

this way they'll find themselves on a fresh trail. One of us must stay on guard." For the girl's peace of mind he cheerfully added, "Nothing to worry about."

"*Sí, señor?* But I do worry. This is a bad place. Let us ride on."

"Whist, darlin'. The horses be played out," said her father.

They selected a clean hut near the north side of the stockade for the girl, and McCarty loosened three logs so they might ride forth with the least loss of time. The girl was induced to retire once they had eaten their supper. When alone with McCarty, the Kentuckian confided:

"I'm terribly worried. By plucking and dressing that bird you left a trail a blind man could follow."

"I'm afraid yez be right, lad," groaned the Irishman. "An' the horses be played out. We'll see if any of these auld houses will make a fort. I've looked into the most of them."

There was one he had not bothered with. It stood near the mouth of the entrance, like a lodge keeper's cottage on a white man's estate. The door of this was barred. Natchez went through the hole of a window and removed the fastening. In one corner stood what appeared to be the effigy of a giant man. Closer examination showed that it once was a human being, but had been mummified by a process of smoking. Stark and ghastly it stood, the empty sockets staring malignantly at them.

"By hivins! If he was the gate keeper he should be out watchin' the entrance to our fine chateau," grimly said McCarty. "Catch hold of the hathan. He's strapped to a board. We'll stand him up at the entrance."

Natchez gave a hand and the mummified guardian of the place was soon looking to the south. They were turning back from this task when they were alarmed by beholding the señorita running toward them.

"For hivin's sake what has happened?" cried McCarty, and with a groan in his voice.

"There's fighting in the north!" ex-

citedly cried the girl. "I heard the sound of guns!"

"God be good to us, an' get us there in safety!" exclaimed McCarty. "It's auld Jackson's riflemen!"

"But the Injuns are between us and the soldiers," Natchez reminded the two. "We must bide here for a while. If we should be picked up by retreating Seminoles—" He did not bother to finish the prophecy.

"Go to the little house an' rest, my daughter," coaxed McCarty. Then in a strident voice he cried, "Can any harm come to you with the McCarty guardin' your door?"

She kissed him, smiled bravely, bowed to Natchez and, with head held high, returned to the cabin. Once she was out of hearing McCarty's voice trembled with fear as he told Natchez:

"It would be better for us if they whip the soldiers an' chase them north. If the soldiers win they'll drive them down here to pile on our backs."

"None of us will fall into their hands alive," said Natchez. "If they retreat the mounted riflemen will chase them. If need be we can fire this place. It will give the soldiers something to ride at. And it will spoil a place where reds might fort themselves. We'll keep the coals of the cooking fire alive."

The stars were so many blazing lamps. In the north the rapid popping of guns lessened. Some one had won a fight.

It lacked half an hour of midnight when Natchez shook the dozing Irishman by the shoulder, and whispered—

"They're coming!"

"God help the Irish!" McCarty groaned as he came to his feet.

They ran to the north wall and peered between the logs. Men were streaming from the north. Some were mounted. A weird cry east of the village impelled the two men to race to the entrance. They heard the excited voices of Seminole men, who were anxious to know what had happened in the north.

One man sniffed the air and said—

"The Red Wolf smells smoke."

"This is a bad place," said another. "Ghosts are cooking a kettle."

"Red Wolf is a brave man. He will see," boasted the first speaker. Two score tall warriors were standing before the entrance.

Natchez whispered to McCarty:

"Arouse your daughter. Be ready to move the logs and ride with her. Start when you hear a gun fired. I'll hold them back—and follow you."

"Follow?" said McCarty. "But the childer comes first. You ride with her. I have influence with these men."

It was a brave lie. Natchez pushed him away and crouched behind the mummy. Red Wolf, singing a medicine song, ignited a torch of tightly bound straw and started through the narrow lane. A man of his clan cried:

"The Red Wolf is a brave man. We will follow him."

Several kept him company. The others advanced more slowly.

The Red Wolf was working himself into a frenzy and cried out that his medicine was making him very strong. Then the blazing torch revealed the hideous specter standing in his path. His voice trailed off into a low sobbing note, then leaped high in dire terror. Natchez lifted the mummy and advanced toward the man. Now the entire company of night prowlers was beholding the sorcerer returned to life and resenting their intrusion. Hideous yells rose to the high heavens, and every man turned and ran as if the arch fiend was at his heels. Red Wolf hurled the blazing torch away so he might seek security in the darkness.

Natchez turned back and sped across the village to prevent his friends from leaving the stockade. His haste was unnecessary, as the girl had refused to flee unless the three of them could ride together. As the Kentuckian came to the two he triumphantly cried:

"It worked! It worked! They left on the jump!"

"But what makes it so light?" exclaimed the señorita.

"Lord have mercy on us!" groaned Nat-

chez. "The fool's torch has fired the town!"

"Cover the head of your horse!" ordered McCarty. "We must dodge the fire an' stick here."

He threw blankets over the heads of two horses to keep them from bolting.



THERE was considerable space between the cabins, and as they were not all burning at the same time, the two men managed to keep the frightened animals from running away. The poor brutes crowded against the men for protection. When the fire caught the walls it roared fiercely and spread swiftly to complete the circle. The heavens were as light and the sky as blue as at noonday. McCarty insisted they remove three logs and pass outside the fiery circle, and it was the girl who stood between the two horses and kept them quiet while her father overturned the blazing timbers and dragged them to one side. The three went through the narrow aperture, and at a distance seated themselves on the ground and watched the clean blaze devour the medicine village. The girl, prone on the grass beside her father, suddenly said—

"I hear many horses galloping!"

"Never mind, sweetheart," he soothed.

"It is so. Put your head to the ground."

McCarty obeyed and quickly told Natchez:

"The childer's right! Many horsemen are coming!"

Natchez listened. There was no mistaking the rhythmic thudding of swift hoofs.

"Only white men, Jackson's mounted riflemen, can ride like that! The fire has drawn them down here!" he cried.

Soon thereafter a dark mass of men poured down from the north, and the officer peered down at the two men and woman and exclaimed—

"White folks!"

The three fugitives were conducted to General Jackson at Blate's post. His face wore a dour expression as he looked up from his examination of the trader's

books and beheld the smiling visage of McCarty. He knew his man at a glance. He coldly greeted—

"So you are turning yourself in, knowing the game is up."

"May all the saints protect you, General! It's crazy I've been to get here ever since the trouble started."

"Sir, you'll be lucky if a court of inquiry does not advise your execution as it did in the case— What! What's this?" He was staring at the smiling, piquant face of Señorita Isobella McCarty, who was standing in the doorway.

Over her shoulder Natchez made known her name, and added—

"Her father has been very busy rescuing her from pirates and Injuns."

"God bless us!" Old Hickory rose and bowed with courtly grace, and then took one small hand and raised it to his lips. "I'm very happy that you have escaped from all dangers, young lady."

"Señor Natchez did more to help than any one can ever know," she earnestly replied. "And my father—really he is a grand *caballero*. So kind. So good. And he so loves the United States. He never could do anything wrong."

Jackson glared helplessly at the smiling adventurer and sternly said—

"A man with such a charming daughter would be lost to all sense of honor, indeed, if he did wrong."

"I've come to enlist, General, now I've got the childer back safe behind a civilized army. I'll always be rememberin' that I'm a good American."

"I will see that you see service, sir," dryly assured Jackson. "You might have made a start before coming here, by wiping out some of the border white pests."

"They be all dead, yer gineralship," blandly assured McCarty. "All dead an' gone to hell, where, before now, they've stolen the devil's crown."

"That is good news if it can be substantiated . . . Natchez, ahem! I find I was mistaken in my estimate of Blate. His private accounts show he was a most

consummate scoundrel. He is guilty of wholesale pillaging, atrocious deceit and the most villainous duplicity. You and McCarty will bring him in as I dearly would love to hang him."

Natchez, as briefly as many interruptions would permit, sketched the oftaking of Blate and the others. He was unconscious of the drama of his narrative, which held the general and his staff spell-bound. When the tale was told Jackson shook his head.

"To be a youth, with fire in the veins! To successfully combat such wretches. The body of the dead man swimming! Ghastly belief. That Razill! His ruthlessness would shame the devil! You should not have told it in the presence of our fair young friend . . . I would like to have been there . . . Ah, well, all that ugliness has ended. The important question now is, when do you two young people marry?"

The señorita turned her head in confusion. Natchez gaped idiotically. Jackson exploded:

"Damme, sir! You've compromised this young lady even though you aided her to escape a terrible fate. I had thought of commissioning you, but there must be no suggestion of a stain on the honor of any officer of mine."

The señorita's face was suffused with pink. Now she lowered her head to conceal her amusement at the young man's embarrassment. Natchez drew a deep breath, and turned to the grand *caballero* and humbly petitioned:

"I would marry your daughter if she would have me. Have I your permission to pay her my respects?"

"Yez have!" roared the McCarty. "Into a convent she goes if she refuses."

"At Pensacola—when we return," mused Jackson. "A military wedding, Captain Natchez Rodney, of Kentucky, and the Señorita Isobella McCarty. Yes, that can be arranged."

"Thank you, my General!" said the girl gravely.



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A NOTE on rough diamonds:

Rochester, New York.

In Arthur O. Friel's "Bush Devils", in the May 1st issue, he mentions, in common with all other authors who incorporate rough diamonds into their stories, the "fire", sparkle, or glitter of the crystals. I have seen hundreds of rough diamonds, and have yet to see one that had any fire whatever. The fire is only developed by expert cutting. Diamonds in the rough look more like oiled glass than anything else, and any one who is not thoroughly familiar with them would cast them aside as worthless.

As regards the "sweet man" crystals (rock crystal, a variety of quartz), they are not connected with diamonds in any way whatever, and their presence in a diamond field would only be a coincidence. Such a coincidence would not be im-

possible however, because quartz is the most common and most widely distributed mineral in the world.

This criticism is not aimed particularly at Mr. Friel, but is generally applicative to all authors who use gems as subject material, either cut or rough. Despite excellent historical background and verisimilitude, these authors surely get off the track in the mineral kingdom. Mr. Friel rates high, as he describes a diamond in the rough as octagonal—which is quite correct. This is far superior to a story of diamonds in a South American oil district which appeared in *Adventure* a year or two ago, in which they were described as glittering hexagonal crystals, an impossible form for a diamond.

—JONATHAN MCCOLLUM BLAIR, mineralogist;
Ward Foundation of Natural Science,
University of Rochester.

A CENTRAL American's impression of buzzards:

Guatemala, C. A.

We have a great many turkey buzzards down here—all black, with the skin on the neck bare and crumpled; even the bill is black. I have observed them from childhood. They are bold yet cowardly. One or two small birds will drive one away. Even humming birds will dart at their heads a few times and the buzzard promptly leaves. I have never seen one put up a fight, even among each other or at feeding time.

It is against the law to kill them here and any person who is seen doing so is fined. But they are disliked by humans and all animals. They smell like decomposed carrion and they stand around on the roofs of the one and two story houses ready to pounce down on whatever they can. They steal meat out of kitchens, raw or cooked, and I have seen them drink hot boiled milk out of a pot standing on the fire. I do not know whether they prefer fresh or stale meat, clean or filthy food. Probably they prefer fresh stuff, but they eat all the filth they can find. Nothing is too filthy for them.

BUT they do attack live animals. I have seen them go for a full grown mule or cow that was not ill but had met with accidents such as broken bones. They will eat the flesh off along the back bone, pick the eyes out and start devouring the hind part of the poor beast and eat him partly up before he is dead.

On the cattle ranches they roost in the trees, and if a calf gets lost from its mother, they can tell by the sound of the bleat and attack and kill it. They kill calves that are several months old, strong and healthy too. Cows expecting to give birth must be guarded, for the buzzard will kill the calf before it is completely born. On the large ranches the expectant cows are kept in a special field, and a couple of men ride through the place all day and shoot at the buzzards and stand guard until the calf is born and can stand up. It is then taken to a large cage and kept there for at least a month. Its mother is nearby and comes twice a day to feed it. All young calves get worms here and feel weak. If left loose the buzzards always kill them.

THERE are two kinds of buzzard that I know of: one completely black, called *topilote*; the other is far larger, almost the size of an eagle, *rey-tope*. Its plumage is not so black; it has cream colored feathers on its neck and red fleshy spots on the cheeks. Perhaps the Montana and Texas buzzard is a different bird from ours here.

In solitary spots—there are many of them—if people meet with an accident and are helpless, the buzzard will eat them. I could write some awful things the buzzards have done in the out-

skirts of towns, as there is comparatively a great deal of crime here. This is the buzzard as I know him.

—IDA DE IBARGÜEN



VICTOR SHAW, of Ask Adventure, suggests Alaska for the enterprising sportsman.

Loring, Alaska.

Don't know as you recall my writing you last year *in re* getting out after king salmon up here with a light rod, and the sport entailed by the fight with this big game fish. The commercial fishermen have been trolling for them and making money catching them for the market, but very few if any of the sportsmen have ever tried it. Indeed few even know it exists. This is brought forcibly to mind by the recent experience of Capt. C. S. Kellison, who is Northwest manager of the A. G. Spaulding Co., of Seattle.

Capt. Kellison the other day landed a 50 lb. king with an 8 ounce rod. It took him 45 minutes of terrific battling to bring the fish to gaff; the gaff being handled dexterously by J. M. Wyckoff, of the Forest Service. The gaff stick broke with the weight of the salmon, but Wyckoff had luckily reached out and put two fingers in the gills and thus yanked in the prize. At that, he was nearly yanked overboard, but was hauled back by an onlooker. Plenty excitement.

DR. M. R. WALTZ, also of Seattle, who accompanied Capt. Kellison, also landed a king salmon weighing 40 lbs. These salmon are identical with our game fish of the northeastern coast rivers, and are fully as fierce and stubborn to land. They have no chance against a power trolling rig, being hauled along willy-nilly by the speed of the boat and also reeled in by the power reel belted to the engine flywheel. They drown being hauled up from a twenty to thirty fathom depth, but even then are gaffed fighting. Capt. Kellison said, in Ketchikan:

"Wealthy sportsmen would come to Southeastern Alaska in bunches if they ever found out about this fishing. You have wonderful trout fishing here, in lakes and streams, but the landing of that one king salmon gave me a thrill that will last me until I can get up here again next season. Best sport I've ever had in the fishing line."

I've been preaching just this for some years, but it is hard getting the ear of those who appreciate such sport. It's so simple and cheap, and requires so little time. Regular air service planes from Seattle land you here in few hours, and the regular steamers only take two days. Airplanes land you in a few minutes from Ketchikan on the various grounds. The height of the season is in June, July and August, when our weather is at

its best and sunniest, and with a guide to point out grounds, ways and means, you'll get all the sport you can stand in few days time at a total cost within reach of most people, nowadays. Hundreds of sporting fishermen spend \$500 to \$1,000 for a summer vacation and this new, untried fishing ground is wide open at that or less cost.

—VICTOR SHAW



STILL one of the most popular orations in the annals of the West—"Riley Grannan's Last Adventure." *Adventure* readers first read it, as reported by Sam C. Dunham, in the issue of January, 1912. Here's a bit of comment by John L. Considine who is, as members of the Camp-fire know, an authority on the old days of the Frontier.

San Francisco, California

Some time ago I wrote Wesley Stout complimenting him upon his Ghost City articles in the *Saturday Evening Post*, which were the most accurate I have read. I mentioned the obituary on Riley Grannan and how often I had seen it in *Adventure*.

I first got that speech from the wire one evening in Reno and had to knock it into shape for the printer—a tough job, for the telegrapher who took it was a particularly illiterate individual. I was greatly impressed by its eloquence. Some of the phrases stuck in my mind for years. One of them was "cribbed, cabined and confined." When I read the *Adventure* version, I found it had been omitted—edited out, I presume, by Sam Dunham, probably because he considered it hackneyed. For, as I learned since, it was not original with Knickerbocker. Brisbane, the Hearst writer, used it only a few days ago.

DUNHAM was an associate of mine in Reno, a very brilliant man. But domestic burdens weighed him down and he sought a relief that betrayed him and wasted his life.

Stout wrote me a very fine letter, telling me he had seen the oration in *Adventure* and had asked your permission to publish it. He was kind enough to let me know that Knickerbocker had quit the wild bunch and returned to the fold.

I knew some of those who heard the Knickerbocker speech. I remember yet how one of them repeated an opening phrase:

"He was born in the sunny southland; he died
in
Raw-
hide."

That falling inflection, intoned in a deep bass, must have been very effective.

—JOHN L. CONSIDINE

POISON ivy—a thrifty home remedy:

Collinsville, Illinois.

Might a woman join your circle? We all read *Adventure*, from my seventy-three year old mother down to our son—and enjoy it from cover to cover. Perhaps I should not ask to sit in, but I would like to, if you men would just move over a bit and if I promise not to talk too much. Sometimes, just once in a long while, a woman knows something that men don't. Little things, you know, not very important, but small helps along the trail.

In your issue of June 15th, Morton Grove of Cape May, New Jersey, writes about taking *extract of poison ivy* and *alcohol* to cure poison ivy or a "shot" of some drug, costing several dollars a treatment.

Well, here is a simple cure and one every adventurer carries in his kit—just common *old yellow laundry soap*!

Wet the soap and rub it on the inflamed part and continue to rub the soap till it forms a thick lather. Then leave it dry on the skin. Perhaps it may have to be repeated, but I think not.

—MRS. WALTER HOERNLEIN.

And home immunization:

Upper Darby, Pennsylvania.

Just a few lines about poison ivy, and not only a cure but a sure preventative.

For five generations our children have been compelled when small to eat an ivy leaf of this poison variety, and this acts evidently as an "anti," for none of us have ever had even a touch of this disease ever again. And others outside our family have used this with certain success.

My own four children when small suffered very much until my mother told me of this remedy, and now all grown up men and women have never again contracted this very irritating disease.

—H. A. VAN NESS.



PROBABLY it won't convince sceptics, but Comrade Frank J. Schindler of our Writers' Brigade has discovered an ingenious answer to a moot question:

Berwyn, Illinois.

Shove over, buddies, and let a guy take the weight off his sore dogs. It's been a long time since I sat in this circle and a lot of beer vats have been wrecked by the dry agents since that time. No doubt, you're wondering what I have on my mind, if anything. Nothing much, only that once an editor bought a yarn from me, but, at the same time, he wanted to have some fun with me, I guess, and chided me for writing. (turn rule and quote) "He laughed like a hyena."

Sezze, the editor, "Why do you write, 'He laughed like a hyena'? Do hyenas laugh? Did anybody ever hear a hyena laugh?" To which I could only reply, "I'll bite; why do hyenas laugh? Or do they? Evidently, it's an old writer's custom, probably handed down from the Spanish." Moreover, the keeper of the Lincoln Park Zoo claims they don't laugh; they cackle.

However, now it comes out, and it seems that hyenas do laugh, and for good reason. If the readers had the same reason, they would probably laugh also. And how! Comes to the front Miss Laura Thompson of Omaha, which is part of a laugh, who served five years in Africa as a missionary.

"In the jungles of Africa," she elucidates, "natives build huts of grass, take great earthen vessels of kaffir corn, kill a cow and cook choice foods and with quantities of beer, place them in the huts as an offering to the ancestors they worship."

Here's where the hyena comes through the center door fancy to get set for the big laugh. Go on: "No sooner are the foodstuffs and beer placed in the huts than the hyenas come to fill up on the poor old ancestors' beer and skittles, and they live a right merry life generally. Why shouldn't they laugh?"

To which your deponent can only echo, "And, indeed, why not?"

—HANK SCHINDLER.



THE genesis of a modern American folksong, as supplied by Wilkeson O'Connell of our Writers' Brigade:

Chapel Hill, North Carolina

As the Governor of North Carolina said to the Governor of South Carolina, etc. I've been having jaundice, that's why. It is a most absorbing and disagreeable disease. And while I was trying to forget it, I took to exploring Carteret County in a motor boat, quite the easiest way to penetrate those parts. The results of one expedition I am now sending you.

The story goes that the rum runner *Adventure*, (yes, honestly, I didn't make it up) grounded off Lookout Bight and was deserted by her crew, because some of my Coast Guard friends came snooping around. Or they thought they were going to. The news of the wreck promptly spread across Back Bay to Harker's, where most of the men who fish off Lookout live.

Fish had been scarce that season, so this wreck proved a godsend to the cash hungry fisherman. The cargo was a full one, and there was more than enough to go 'round. But the Island got most of it. They are reputed right smart folk all along the Sounds. One man is reported to have dredged two hundred dollars' worth in one afternoon—more than he'd have netted (excuse the pun) in a whole season ordinarily.

THE song was written by a fisherman from Massachusetts, who many years ago drifted down to Harker's Island, where he is still extant. I don't know him. His name is Ralph Saunders. It was sung to me—after considerable blarney—in a sweet, husky, whisky tenor, by the biggest man on the Banks, hight Burt Hunter, weight 320 lbs. It's true folk stuff, even if it is post-Prohibition, for it was written and sung by the fishermen themselves to celebrate a memorable incident that happened among them.

The tune is faintly—but very faintly—reminiscent of "The Sidewalks of New York," and the meter doesn't stutter when Hunter sings it to his guitar. Though he made an awful fuss about singing it—said he'd gotten religion and all that sort of thing—he was pleased as punch to dictate it to me.

—WILKESON O'CONNELL.

WHEN THE BOOZE YACHT CAME ASHORE

Down around the Beehive,
The fisherman's retreat,
Every night and morning
All the fishermen would meet.
One day a rounder*
Came rushing by the door,
Says, "Boys, let's go to Cape Lookout;
There's a booze yacht came ashore."

(Chorus)

*This way, that way,
To the Capes they'd run.
The coming of the Adventure
Had put the fishing on the bum.
Some folks they've lost religion
And backslide by the score.
Kinglock stopper it stood ace high,
When the booze yacht came ashore.*

That's when all the rounders
For miles and miles around
Kept the snappers** busy
A-cruising through Core Sound.
Some of them were happy,
Some of them were sore
That Harker's Island had flourished
When the booze yacht came ashore.

(Chorus)

Things have changed since those days;
Some are up in G,
Then some are down and out,
But they all feel just like me.
Some would part with all they've got,
Some with a little bit more,
If there was another time just like that,
When the booze yacht came ashore.

(Chorus)

*A rounder: a fisherman who will take on any job he can get, going from one to another, instead of sticking to a specialty. Barring the engineers, they are practically all rounders.

**Snapper: a small sailboat, with a peculiar rig.

ASK ADVENTURE

*For free information
and services you
can't get
elsewhere*



South America

RAISING tapirs, curassows, mangoes
and *chirimoyas* in California.

Request.—"1. Would it be possible to have a pair of tapirs sent to me here in California?

2. How heavy does a full grown tapir get to be?

3. You have said that the wild turkey or curassow is larger than any turkey, and is easily domesticated. How heavy will a full grown bird get?

4. Can I have a shipment of eggs sent to me?

5. Could I get some young mango trees, both cling and free stone? I have eaten the mango in Cuba and Porto Rico, and am very fond of them.

6. What other fruits do you think could be raised here in Southern California, that in your opinion would be different than anything we have here, and at the same time really good eating?"

—DEAN M. JEWELL, Artesia, California

Reply. by Mr. Edgar Young:—1. I don't believe there is any restriction on importing tapirs into the U. S. You see them in many zoos here. They have a number in the Bronx Park Zoo here in New York. If you can get some one to trap them for you, there would be no trouble getting them up to you by ship from Panama.

2. About 400 lbs.

3. A full grown curassow stands about as high as a sugar barrel, although they are not quite as stocky as a turkey. I would say a fat one would weigh about half as much again as a turkey, possibly twice as much.

4. You might get these eggs from British Guiana or Colombia; or Venezuela would be better. They have a number of them in the U. S. in zoos and it might be that you could dicker for them here.

5. It might be better to get your mango seeds or seedlings from nearer home. Some of the finest mangoes I ever ate came from Mazatlan, Mexico,

and I think they also have them in Guaynas. Some of the railroad employees at Mazatlan or Guaynas might be able to get them for you. Try Jefe de Trenes, Sur Pacifico de Mexico, Mazatlan, Mexico—in English, as he speaks it fluently.]

6. I believe most of the Mexican, Central American and most of the South American fruits could be raised in California, and it might be a good idea to try to introduce them there. The *chirimoya* is hard to beat, and I never saw any one who did not like it on first try.

Bottom Fishing

ROCKS or railroad spikes (or a dipsey sinker, if you're particular) will carry your bait down to the deep feeders in Old Mississipp—*and you might bring up anything from a "cat" to a "buffalo."*

Request:—"I have done considerable fishing for catfish with what I called a throw line.

In this, the weight was at the end of the line, with the first hook on a line about a foot long, this being attached to the main line about two feet from the weight. Occasionally, I used a second hook. I used no rod.

Inasmuch as a rod is very often used, would this kind of fishing not be more appropriately called bottom fishing?

What other fish, in addition to cats, are sought by means of this bottom fishing?

Personally, I have always used the dipsey sinker, when obtainable. What do you generally use for this kind of fishing?"

—A. E. KEMMULING, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Reply, by Mr. John B. Thompson:—Your method of fishing in the Mississippi River with a throw line catches catfish, eels, buffalo, drum, sturgeon, suckers and the deep feeders of those waters. Of course, this is a style of bottom fishing. Many use more than the two hooks that you have been using. A dipsey sinker as you use is just right, though the natives use rocks, large nuts or railroad spikes. Anything heavy. They fish commercially—also for fun and providing fish for food.

Stamp

TOO bad—the Shackleton Antarctic stamps were unofficial, and are therefore of no value to philatelists.

Request:—"I have two one-penny New Zealand postage stamps that were issued and canceled by the Sir Ernest Shackleton Antarctic expedition at their farthest south in King Edward VII Land. This, I believe, was very close to the South Pole and I think somewhere about the year 1912.

The color of the stamp is red and the picture is the figure of a woman. Above the woman are the words

'New Zealand'; below the woman 'Universal Postage' and below that 'One Penny'. Lengthways of the stamp are superimposed the words 'King Edward VII Land', printed in black ink. Only enough of the cancelation can be made out as to read 'Antarctic Expedition.'

I am anxious to know what cash value these stamps may have, if any."

—H. A. JOHNSTON, Monte Christi, Dominican Republic.

Reply, by Mr. H. A. Davis:—The stamps you mention were surcharged and used by private parties, were not authorized by the postal department and are not catalogued in the general catalogues. They are therefore of no philatelic value except as oddities and are worth what a collector of such items would be willing to pay.

I have in the past seen them advertised for a few cents each.

Mountain Climbing

THE second ten thousand feet of Mt. McKinley, no stunt for a beginner.

Request:—"I would like some information on Mt. McKinley and the country thereabouts.

1. How far inland is the mountain and what method of transportation is there?

2. Is the surrounding country barren or does it have timber on farther south?

3. Can one climb that high without oxygen?

4. What has been the technique in past ascents, and about what would be my program in climbing the mountain?"

—GEORGE M. GRUBBS, Los Angeles, California

Reply, by Mr. Theodore S. Solomons:—1. McKinley is around a hundred miles or so from the coast, and is the highest peak of the range sometimes called by its name, which extends up from the long backbone or tail of western Alaska, ending southward in the Aleutian Islands. The range divides the Susitna Valley, through which the government railroad goes overland to the Yukon Valley from the western rolling plains and coastal plain of Alaska drained by the Kuskokwim River and its branches. It is all a good hunting and fishing country, with largely unexplored and highly promising country just west of the range.

2. The mountains are timbered here and there, but not so well as farther south. The west slope is quite different from the eastern. You get off the railroad opposite the mountain and will find a road leading to the base of the range in the vicinity of McKinley.

3. No oxygen is required in any mountain climbing except in the higher Himalayas in Northern India. You have to go slow, that's all, when you get into those altitudes, and take plenty of rest. My height limit has been about fifteen thousand feet. I never tried for the top of McKinley.

4. No one should undertake it unless he is an experienced mountain climber, though any good climber *might* make it, weather conditions being good. So far as I know, it has only been climbed to the actual summit by a handful of men. I do not know who were the latest ascenders, or when. Your actual hike would probably be about ten miles beyond your highest camp with pack or riding animals, four or five thousand feet up. From there you would pack, up to as high a point as possible where you had the markings of an all night camp and fuel—say a few dry brush sticks and a little soil. I think that would be about eight or ten thousand feet, and the other ten thousand feet or so would be your job the next day, starting before daylight, say by a late moon. You should read up on prior accounts of climbing, or get the best dope from local residents. A mountain of that sort isn't accessible from more than one or two approaches, usually. The rest get you into slopes from which you can get no farther, or that forbid reaching the final summit. (There are two at Mt. McKinley.) There are stations near the mountain base, and possibly, by now, on the actual slope.

Congo

UNDER the sovereignty of Leopold II, Captain de Sturler spent some four years in the Congo to confirm or refute rumors regarding the treatment of negroes, an investigation to which he referred several months ago. In reply to another reader, he gives a glimpse of one of the darkest chapters in the recent history of the white race.

Request:—"1. I would like to ask if, in your investigations in the Congo, you found any traces of the mistreatment of the natives. I remember distinctly when *Leslie's* carried a great many photos of mutilated men and women, also of children.

2. Were these conditions as bad as pictured, or were they a lot of propaganda such as was put out during the war?"

—H. G. DORR, Wahoo, Nebraska

Reply, by Capt. R. W. van Raven de Sturler:—
1. During my stay in the Congo I took many hundreds of photographs, showing men and women of all ages and children from about 8 to 13 or 14 years old, lacking either one or both hands or feet, which had been amputated by order of some of the inhuman beasts that were later removed and punished for their cruelties to innocent human beings. I was not aware that *Leslie's* ever published any pictures of these events, but do not doubt that they were authentic.

2. Yes, conditions were bad—take in consideration the utter helplessness of the victims after the wounds were healed and the suffering they went through undeservedly during the healing process, if

they did not bleed to death, which was not a rare occurrence. Medical aid—even had there been any—was not forthcoming, and they were just lucky if they pulled through. There was no propaganda about it; it was just greed and viciousness of a number of depraved white men, let loose without supervision on a lot of helpless natives.

Python

WHAT is a mouthful for this extraordinary swallower?

Request:—"I made the statement that the python could swallow a young deer. A friend claims it to be impossible.

I still think that it is possible, so will you please enlighten me on this subject."

—FRANK GRISOLI, New York City

Reply, by Mr. Clifford H. Pope:—You are perfectly safe in your contention that a python can swallow a deer, and doubly so if you qualify it by saying a young deer. Many species of deer do grow too large to be swallowed by a python, but on the other hand many smaller species are swallowed at any age. While the exact swallowing capacity of large snakes is not a matter dealt with at length in scientific monographs, many works of travel and books of popular science contain authentic photographs of pythons that have swallowed deer, antelopes, pigs and the like.

Log Cabin

ASHAKE roof and a puncheon floor belong in the picture, but there are substitutes for the man who can't manage the primitive hewer's art.

Request:—"I want to build a log cabin about 14' x 12', but do not understand how. Have some idea regarding putting the walls up, but when it comes to the roof, doors and windows, I am not sure. Also regarding the floor.

Any information regarding this subject will be appreciated."

—AL. COHN, Chicago, Illinois

Reply, by Mr. Paul M. Fink:—Your log cabin may be built of either logs peeled, or with the bark on, preferably the former, using poles from 8 to 10 inches in diameter, with the sills a little larger. Leave the windows and doors until the walls are up to the full height, then saw out the desired openings, first spiking a plank to the sides of the openings to be cut. When sawing is done, spike the door jambs and window frames in place to the ends of the logs and remove the outside strips. Logs should be about three feet longer than the desired inside dimensions, to allow for notching and lapping at the corners.

In the backwoods, roofs are usually made of clapboards or shakes, but it is increasingly hard to find a man who knows the art of riving these, and I would

suggest that unless you can find one you use composition roofing.

Hunting cabins are often left with a packed earthen floor. The old-timers used puncheons—logs flattened on one side with the ax—but if boards are available you had better use them. Use boards for making a batten door, and close the window the same way, unless you can pack in a sash. Even then it is best to have a board shutter, fastened on the inside, to protect you from vandalism in your absence.

All cracks between logs should be closely chinked with chips or small stones, and then daubed with clay or mortar to keep out wind and weather.

Build the chimney of either rough stone or weathered boulders, cemented together and well plastered inside. If there is no stone available, a passable chimney can be constructed of sticks, built crib-fashion, and plastered three or four inches thick, inside and out.

Building a cabin is too big a subject to be more than touched upon in the scope of one letter, and for fuller information I would suggest that you consult Kephart's "Camping & Woodcraft," vol. II, and, for more pretentious structures, Brimmer's "Log Cabins, Camps and Cottages."

Flying Over Mexico

DON'T expect emergency landing fields. The Government and the gasoline companies will do their best to assist you at the regular airports.

Request:—"I'd like to get the lowdown on your present surrounding country in regard to the safety of flying.

1. Is the country around Oaxaca rough or rolling? Also, is there a plateau to the east?

2. How is the source of supply for petrol? Is there much air service through there at present?

3. Is the coast in good condition for amphibian jobs to land?

4. We are not figuring to commercialize on flying, but have something better up our sleeve; and who would you advise us to correspond with for air permits—the State governments or the Federal Government?" —W. A. HUGHES, Lakewood, Ohio

Reply, by Mr. John Newman Page:—1. Oaxaca is a mountainous state; Oaxaca City is located in a valley, surrounded by mountains. There is a fairly good landing field just east of town, which has not been used for some months.

2. There is no special aviation gasoline available in Oaxaca City, but doubtless either the Huasteca or Aguila people would be glad to ship it from Mexico City to their branches here for you. Mail and passenger service have both been suspended from here as unprofitable.

3. Much of the coast is broken by mountains, which crowd right down to the seashore. This is

especially true of the western coast. I am told that you could land on the coast near Pinotepa Nacional, in the west, though I have not been there personally. There are several points where an amphibian could land along the Tehuantepec coast, to the east. There is a good landing field at Pinotepa, another at San Jeronimo Ixtepec, and the one previously spoken of at Oaxaca City.

4. Apply to the Aviation Division of the War Department, at Mexico City, preferably through the nearest Mexican Consulate. Mexican consular officials usually are extremely accommodating and can cut a lot of red tape for you. Here's a tip: If you do any flying about the coasts, be careful about your photographic apparatus. Picture taking by foreigners is absolutely prohibited.

Canoe

PATCHING up a hole in the bow.

Request:—"I've just got hold of a sixteen-foot canoe. It's got a hole in the bow about six inches long and the width of the distance between ribs. It's all the way through; the former owner ran a rapid and came over a small falls on to a sharp rock. The canvas is in perfect condition, but the paint is cracked and checked. Ribs and keel O.K.

1. How can I repair this hole so as to make a patch as nearly invisible as possible, and yet watertight?

2. Would you recommend two coats of white lead after stripping the paint off and, if so, how long should I give it to dry?"

—IRVING GOMBERG, Providence, Rhode Island

Reply, by Mr. Edgar S. Perkins:—1. Cut the wood frame back to where the frame is firm and strong, then set in a solid piece of wood to fit the space and make it fast to ribs by metal strapping and screws. If canvas is cut, you will cut it back and then loosen edges from frame and slide in silk piece with marine glue; then canvas patch to match cut out space and another piece of thin silk over the canvas patch and lapping on to the good canvas. If this is done neatly, after painting it will not be visible, but the inside work on the frame will show.

2. Use regular canoe filler instead of white lead and rub the second coat down with fine grade sandpaper, then a coat of canoe enamel; and for lasting and appearances a coat of varnish over the enamel.

Pearls

MILADY, who wears them, never smelled mussel meat ripe for working.

Request:—"What is the best and most workable method of extracting seed pearls from mussels? At what size does a pearl become a gem? What would you call a pearl the size of a half-carat stone, a perfect half-sphere, representing an eye with a large dark blue-black pupil surrounded with a gray-

blue iris?" —FRED BAHOVER, Baranof, Alaska

Reply, by Mr. Raymond S. Spears:—The most popular method of opening mussels for extracting pearls is the "cooking out" method. The mussels are steamed open, and then gone over by hand to extract the pearls. Another method is to let the mussels decay and, when sufficiently rotten, to pass through a sieve which holds the pearls, barque and slugs which were in the meats.

The size at which a pearl becomes a gem would depend on the luster and appearance. Any pearl of sufficient size for use in a necklace, stickpin, etc., and of good quality would be valuable. The prices of seed pearls vary, but are not large.

The perfect half-sphere which you mention is what is known as a biscuit pearl, though I have never heard of one marked in the way you describe. The value would probably not be great, unless it could be sold to some one interested in freak pearls.

Forest Ranger,

OUT in the open, in all sorts of weather, usually alone, the job demands a man who is also a good housekeeper.

Request:—"1. Is a forest ranger permitted to hunt,

fish and trap under the regular laws of the State in which he is on duty?

2. Does the Government provide a home and provisions?

3. Is a forester alone all of the time or does he have a companion or assistant?"

—AMERICUS H. WOODWARD, Salem, New Jersey

Reply, by Mr. Ernest W. Shaw:—1. Yes, under State laws, but not at the expense of his time, or job, whichever way one cares to express it. The work required is such that in only exceptional instances can he take time to hunt, and I should say never to trap while on duty, and that means all the time when in the field.

2. When the ranger is stationed at a point where he can not rent his home from others, the Government builds one and deducts a monthly rental from his salary.

The ranger also provides all of his subsistence, clothing, personal equipment for household purposes, saddles and horses and horse equipment. Government furnishes tools and equipment for the work at hand.

3. It depends entirely on the nature of the work. Much of the work is done alone. Often where help is needed two or more men work together. One must be prepared, however, to work much of the time alone.

Our Experts—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

1. **Service**—It is free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelope and full postage, *not attached*, are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.
2. **Where to Send**—Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. **DO NOT** send questions to this magazine.
3. **Extent of Service**—No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.
4. **Be Definite**—Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.

A complete list of the "Ask Adventure" experts appears in the issue of the fifteenth of each month

THE TRAIL AHEAD—THE NEXT ISSUE OF *ADVENTURE*, AUGUST 15th



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